

Internet Search meets the Desktop

The use of a search engine has become the starting point for most users on the Internet, so much that Internet browsers have built in access for the most popular search engines. Using a search engine has become so common that many spend hours a day looking through the search results attempting to find information on external web sites. While Internet search is extremely valuable, most organizations create a wealth of knowledge that is locked in internal documents and electronic mail that is not easily searchable. Most applications have built in search capabilities using the basic find feature, but the document must be located first and then loaded before it can be searched. Even Microsoft has found this to be true and has attempted to solve this problem a few different times with the Microsoft Indexing Service and the much slower Windows XP Explorer Search 'dog' where simple text searches are possible.

The best attempt at solving this problem came from Google's free Desktop Search utility. Unlike Google, waiting for Microsoft's very simple search utility using the find 'files with this name' and find 'A word or phrase in the file' is like watching paint dry. At least the Google Desktop search creates a keyword database speeding up searches in a friendly Google like search result page. Although Microsoft's indexing service does create a keyword database, this services was never well exploited like the Google Desktop search system.

The most important feature of any search system is finding the files and indexing the text for fast search results. Google has gone to great lengths to include all of the standard Office documents, Adobe PDF files and even the Microsoft Outlook & Outlook Express mailbox indexing. Even with the improved searching capability offered, there is a cost. First, at any time, your computer may start to re-index each file taking the performance to a stand-still while it working in the background building up the keyword database. Second, if your Internet connection is slow or not functioning, the Google Desktop search can be painstakingly slow or return no results. Finally, Google has to make money also by displaying advertising, similar pages, and even your competitor's information within the search results.

A few companies have started to solve this problem by offering search software for the Enterprise. The advantage of Enterprise Search is a dedicated service for an organization located within the local area network or intranet where documents are indexed on a central system thus relieving your computer for you to work. These new dedicated search services have been incorporated into Document Management systems and databases allowing for retrieving the specific information generated by the employees across all computers in the organization, including file servers.

Even Google recognized the need for Enterprise Document Search. Google, along with Thunderstone and Black Tulip System's ONEZEEK product line, these new search appliances are more than just software, they are dedicated hardware - software platforms that unify search for the Enterprise for every type of document and every computer on the intranet. This new class of networked search appliance is very appealing to the enterprise IT managers because it solves a very real problem while being very easy to install and maintain.

Although the appliances are target more at larger organizations, GRID technology may be another part of the future of Enterprise search where each computer on the intranet shares the responsibility of providing search for the entire organization. Currently, Black Tulip Systems has been working towards a system such as this, but this may still be a year or so out before showing up on a desktop near you.