

# **Ten things no one tells you about enterprise search**

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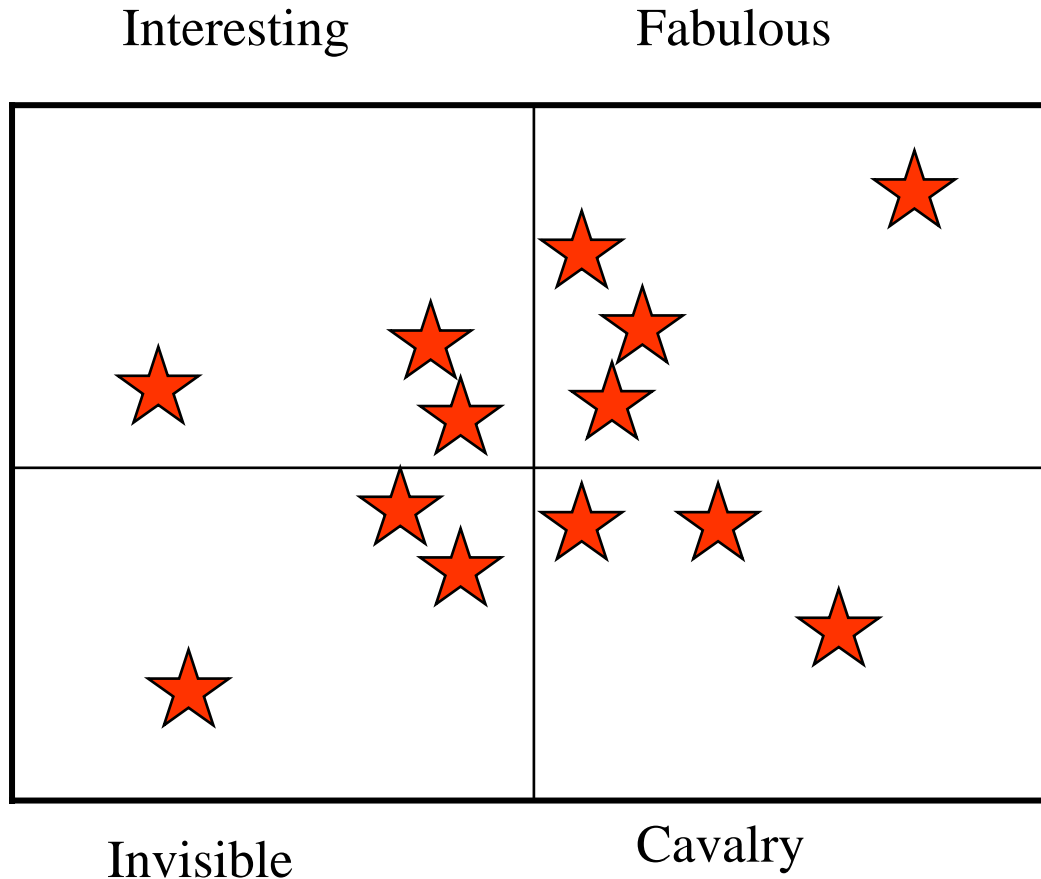
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**Except me!**

# Introduction

- Most organisations have not yet implemented an enterprise search solution
- There is therefore not a great deal of experience to call on, other than this conference
- There are few published case studies of enterprise search implementations, and even fewer (if any?) of those that report on implementations that failed to meet expectations
- Choosing just ten alerts was not easy!

# 1. Be careful with charts – Part 1



# 1. Be careful with charts – Part 2

- There is no such thing as ‘best-of-breed’
- There is no such thing as ‘one size fits all’
- The search engine business is growing at over 25% per year at present. New companies will emerge
- As with CMS procurement, determining the Total Cost of Implementation is very difficult, as most of the costs arise post-installation
- Any procurement has to be based on clear requirements and a great deal of planning and experimentation

## 2. All users are not the same

- It is very easy to make assumptions about how employees will use enterprise search
- Scaling up from intranet search screens and log analysis can be misleading, especially if the searching of structured data and third-party (SAP etc) applications are now on offer
- Enterprise users want information, not a document or a link
- Consider using personas to define requirements

# 3. Usability is everything

- One screen does not fit all
- Usually insufficient attention is paid to the refinement of a search, which may not be just reducing the number of hits with more terms
- The critical issue is the extent to which the user interfaces can be customised for groups of users, rather than at a generic user level
- Usability testing of these interfaces takes considerable resource, and a lot of user patience

## 4. Relevance is contextual

- Relevance is both the most useful and the most useless measure of search performance
- This is because relevance is contextual to a person and a time
- The way in which 'relevance' is presented, and can be managed by the user and the search administrator has a significant impact on the quality of the search experience and the level of trust in the application
- The 'Best bets' solution can be very labour-intensive. Use with care!

## 5. Does it scale?

- Enterprise search performance is very dependent a wide range of systems characteristics
  - Server architecture
  - Network architecture
  - Spidering/index management
  - Storage management
  - Document/content formats
  - Load in-balance
- Modelling this behaviour is not at all easy

## 6. Application integration is not easy

- “We have an API for all databases”
- However integration involves
  - Content aggregation from disparate sources
  - Reviewing and integrating index structures
  - Managing the user interface
  - Developing administration routines
- Other departments may ‘own’ the data. Are they “on side”?
- Watch what happens with Google ‘Onebox’

# 7. Metadata IS important

- Metadata is more than keywords
- Search is more than string-searching
- In an enterprise environment metadata about authors, departments, versions, security and a host of other parameters is essential
- A major challenge for the enterprise is managing changes in vocabulary and meaning, and this cannot (at present!) be easily automated

## 8. Implementation never stops and it is people-intensive

- A large enterprise search application will need a team to support the tuning of searches and the integration of new content and applications
- Changes in business requirements and content scope will require even the most basic of searches to be reviewed
- This is where personas, quality search logs and usability testing are essential to maintaining search performance
- And then there is the upgrade issue!

## 9. Find something you shouldn't have?

- Document security is often maintained through server fire-walls or email circulation lists.
- Unless the appropriate metadata is applied, and maintained, the chances of inappropriate access are high
- Responsibility for document, and sub-document, security, is often poorly defined in most companies
- Managing access to legacy content can be a nightmare

# 10. There are risks as well as benefits

- The benefits case is often made on the intuitive statement that being able to find all information and knowledge is a ‘good thing’
- The risks also need to be assessed, such as
  - Can null results be trusted?
  - Is it possible to identify the latest version of a document or information?
  - When where the indices last updated
- A full risk register can be very valuable in managing expectations

# In summary

- Be careful with charts
- All users are not the same
- Usability is everything
- Relevance is contextual
- Does it scale?
- Application integration is not easy
- Metadata is important
- Implementation never stops and it is people-intensive
- Find something you shouldn't have?
- There are risks as well as benefits

# Some web resources

- [www.searchtools.com](http://www.searchtools.com)
- [www.cmswatch.com](http://www.cmswatch.com)
- [www.ideaeng.com](http://www.ideaeng.com)
- [www.fastsearch.com](http://www.fastsearch.com) (briefing papers)
- [www.unstruct.org](http://www.unstruct.org)
- [www.steptwo.com.au](http://www.steptwo.com.au) (esp. Intranet Search report)
- [www.findability.org](http://www.findability.org)
- [www.searchmax.blogspot.com](http://www.searchmax.blogspot.com)
- [www.arnoldit.com](http://www.arnoldit.com)
- [www.infonortics.com/searchengines](http://www.infonortics.com/searchengines)

# If all else fails!

- Enterprise Search Guidebook. Martin White, Freepint, 2005
- <http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/enterprise-search/>
- The Enterprise Search Handbook, Martin White, Facet Publishing, London.2007 (Hopefully)