

To make intranet search successful, the right technology must be put in place, and the necessary work undertaken to design and configure its operation.

Once these practical steps have been completed, the next key issue is to resolve who ‘owns’ search on the intranet. In other words, who has the responsibility for maintaining and improving search, and has the access to the search engine to make the required changes.

Owning search

In most cases, the ownership of search should not reside within IT. The search engine may have been originally installed by the IT department, with the necessary work done to integrate it with the intranet as a whole.

Beyond these initial activities, however, search should be owned by the intranet team, and maintained as part of their overall intranet activities. Only the intranet team is likely to have the right focus, skills and time to ensure that search is effective for staff throughout the organisation.

The intranet team should be given a high degree of access to the search engine itself, with the ability to change configuration files and other settings.

Of course, there will be some aspects that will require greater levels of technical knowledge or programming skill. In these situations, the intranet team will need to have a good working relationship with IT to gain the necessary assistance.

IT may also be able to provide valuable input on possible search engine approaches, particularly where search is being integrated with other systems, or when enterprise search is being implemented.

What does ownership involve?

Every month, several hours should be devoted to regular monitoring and maintenance of search.

Once the general intranet search engine has been improved, there will almost certainly be specialist intranet needs that can be met by developing additional search tools and interfaces.

In practice, this will involve regular activities such as:

1. Monitoring and reporting

At the end of each month, the most popular searches and failed searches reports should be reviewed. These provide a general ‘health check’ of the intranet, allowing issues with the design or content of the site to be quickly identified.

2. Synonyms and best bets

Problems identified in the reports listed above can often be immediately fixed by adding the terms to the list of synonyms within the search engine. Key resources should also be steadily added to the list of ‘best bets’.

3. Tuning and metadata

The search engine should be regularly tuned to improve the quality of the results for common searches. Metadata should also be added to key documents to ensure that they appear towards the beginning of search results.

4. Adding content

The failed searches report will identify searches for information that does not exist on the intranet. These should be noted, and passed to the relevant business area.

5. Fixing content issues

Fundamentally, it’s impossible to deliver an effective intranet search if the quality and consistency of the underlying intranet content is poor. A minimum of a few hours per month should be devoted to fixing the most significant of these issues.

6. Improvements to search engine design

Additional functionality can be added over time, to increase the power and richness of the search engine, or to expand the scope of content that it searches.

Over time, these regular tasks will greatly improve the effectiveness of search, even if only a few hours are devoted each month.

Note that few of these tasks require technical or developer skills. Instead, they are directly related to the management of the intranet itself, with search just one element of this.