

# The Forgotten Search Solution

By Shaun Ryan, CEO, SLI Systems

When you buy a new home, one of the first things you set out to do is decorate it and make it your own. You may hang new window treatments, add different paint colors to the walls or even do some remodeling projects like finishing a basement. But, what about the outside of the home? You wouldn't buy a house and spend money on fixing-up the inside without also paying attention to the exterior. While you want the inside to be comfortable and inviting, enhancing the appearance on the outside is just as important for increasing curb appeal and making guests feel welcome.

Similarly, when a company decides to overhaul its enterprise search system, it's common for them to only look at technologies designed for searching inside their business (i.e. helping staff find information stored in various company repositories) and assume that the outside (i.e. searching on the company's website) can be performed by the same solution.

Solutions for searching public-facing information on a website are the often-forgotten step children of enterprise search. But, as

companies have realized their external-facing information is as important as what is located on the inside, these solutions have developed considerably, building on technologies originally used within organizations and augmented by their own unique approaches.

## Serving Your Public

A company's public-facing website is often its first point of connection with the outside world and, as such, is an important method for building brand, communicating with customers and partners and in many cases increasing sales—particularly if visitors find the information they're looking for quickly.

Because people have become accustomed to efficient search tools on the Web like Google or Yahoo! or within an organization, they have developed a low tolerance for search methods that produce poor results. Therefore, it is critical to serve website visitors with search functionality that allows them to find what they need quickly and efficiently.

## Site Search in Practice

SLI Systems' hosted site search and SEO solutions are built on patented advanced search technology, which continually "learns" from past site search activity. By tracking visitors' aggregate search queries and click-thrus, SLI delivers results based on popularity. Whether companies use their website to sell products or provide support or information, SLI will return the most relevant search results.

Hundreds of companies have recognized the importance of powering their websites with SLI's site search solutions to meet their customers' needs, build brand, increase customer loyalty and drive revenue.

One such company, *The New England Journal of Medicine* (NEJM), uses SLI Systems' on-demand search services so its readers can quickly identify important new medical research and advances in treatments.

As the most widely read, cited and influential general medical journal in the world, NEJM has long recognized the important role online distribution and interactions have for physicians and healthcare professionals. The company turned to SLI Systems to help its online medical community more immediately identify important new research and clinical information.

Because SLI's Learning Search delivers results based on relevance and popularity, NEJM readers can easily find articles their colleagues are reading and what the community considers to be important information about advances in research and therapeutic options. Given the increasing amount of biomedical research available and new findings cited every day, SLI is helping NEJM meet the challenge of helping medical professionals sift through significant medical developments to find the latest trends and treatment advances.

SLI works closely with its customers to ensure their external facing websites provide visitors with the most relevant and timely content possible. Organizations that understand enterprise search entails more than just searching what is on the inside of the company are reaping the benefits of providing an exceptional search experience to all of their audiences, no matter where they are seeking information.



Dr. Shaun Ryan

As a co-founder of SLI Systems, Dr. Shaun Ryan was one of the developers of the company's unique "Learning Search" site search technology. He was also an original founder of GlobalBrain, which was bought by

Snap/NBCi.com in 2000. Ryan and his partners later bought back the company and renamed it SLI Systems. Prior to GlobalBrain, Ryan consulted with companies including international health technology company Invacare. He is a frequent speaker at the Search Engine Strategies conferences globally and posts insights on site search trends to SLI's blog.

A recent survey SLI Systems conducted (November, 2007) supports this notion by highlighting the fact that the majority of people who cannot find what they're looking for on a website within the first minute or two of landing on the site, will leave and often not return.

## All Searches are Not Created Equal

Because searches conducted on internal data stores differ significantly from those conducted on a website, search products must be designed specifically for each function to be effective. The content an internal search product is responsible for navigating, for example, typically contains multiple types of documents and unstructured database files, while information contained on a website is often product-oriented or contains corporate materials. The way this information is indexed and displayed to users varies with both approaches, as do metrics. For example, a typical product search on a website may contain an image of the product, descriptive information, pricing and availability details and may integrate into an ecommerce platform.

Luckily, search technologies have advanced considerably in the past few years. Today, search technologies are much more in tune with the type of information being searched. In the case of site search, when someone submits a query on a public-facing website, the information should be readily available for the searcher to review, filter and select the item that he is looking for.

Likewise, a site search solution should offer other important features, such as search engine optimization (SEO) capabilities to drive greater traffic to a website from major search engines. Site search solutions can also take advantage of hosting models like SaaS to provide the flexibility and business efficiencies not available with installed software. ■