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Bob Keating
Project Lead



ABOUT GOOGLE CUSTOM SEARCH BUSINESS EDITION

Google Custom Search Business Edition is a Software-as-a-Service offering that allows organizations to create a search engine in just a few seconds across any collection of websites. Google Custom Search runs off the same index as Google.com and returns fast, relevant results for your organization's website.

For more information, visit www.google.com/enterprise/csbe/

The Business Gateway helps small business owners find the information they need with Google Custom Search

Background

The Business Gateway is a Presidential e-government initiative aimed at simplifying small businesses' interactions with the government. This unique U.S. federal government program helps its customers find information from federal, state and local government. The Business Gateway's goals are to reduce the paperwork and compliance burden so small companies can focus on building their business. Twenty-one federal government agencies participate in the initiative, which is managed by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

This group launched the website business.gov in 2004 to provide information to help small companies start, manage, and grow their businesses.

Challenge

Small businesses that are just getting started may need to interact with the government for a variety of reasons, including: complying with government regulations like taxes and environmental laws; applying for financial and technical assistance available to small businesses; and learning how to become a government contractor.

Most businesses have obligations to government at the federal, state, and local levels, so the quantity of information for small businesses to navigate quickly becomes unwieldy.

“You should not need a degree in government to understand where you need to go for information,” said Nancy Sternberg, program manager for the Business Gateway initiative. “Everyone knows about the IRS, but if you're a business who deals with trade or workplace safety issues, people don't know where to go.”

The Business Gateway project aims to provide a complete picture to small business owners searching for information across all levels of government. Initially, they used

The screenshot shows the Business.GOV website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for HOME, SMALL BUSINESS GUIDES, STATE & LOCAL INFO, GOVERNMENT FORMS, FREQUENT QUESTIONS, and CONTACTS & HELP. A search bar is present with the query 'business license in seattle wa'. Below the search bar, the results are displayed under the heading 'state & local search'. The results list several links related to business licenses in Seattle and King County, including 'How to Obtain a Business License', 'Business License Index - How to Obtain a Business License', and 'Department of Executive Administration - Business License Information'. On the right side, there's a sidebar with a search box for 'Looking for Business License or Permit?' and a map of Washington state highlighting the Seattle area. At the bottom, there's a pagination bar showing 'Results Page 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Next'.

another search solution which was extremely expensive and did not provide relevant results to business.gov visitors. The site saw a drop in customer satisfaction scores in 2006 due to content gaps and poor search results. The Business Gateway team promptly decided to investigate other search options that could meet their needs for cost-effective, relevant results that would help small businesses locate exactly what they needed across the various government websites.

Solution

Business Gateway, with the help of Touchstone Consulting, implemented Google Custom Search Business Edition on the business.gov site in November 2007 for all federal government information specific to small businesses. Google Custom Search runs off the same index as Google.com and requires no hardware or software installations.

“Setting up Google Custom Search was really simple,” said Bob Keating of Touchstone Consulting, project lead for Business Gateway. “It was unbelievable. I had all the data and it was just a matter of dropping it in there.”

After the first phase was complete, the project team dedicated their attention to incorporating state and local content, which was made easier with Google Custom Search. In February 2008, the Business Gateway introduced search spanning 9,000 state and local websites and returning geographically appropriate results for the customer’s query, all with sub-second response time.

A query parser looks at any geographic terms included in a search – such as a city and state, county, or zip code – and then returns results from the state and local agency websites for that area. In addition, business.gov has integrated Google Maps into its search results so that users can find locations and contact information for in-person services.

“We now make information available easily in an accessible manner,” said Nancy Sternberg. “We have pulled together information from across the federal government, and took it further recently by going to the state and local level. This allows business owners to go to one place and not search and search.”

Results

For business.gov, customer satisfaction scores – as measured by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) – are rising, and the feedback from small businesses in usability testing is positive. Small business users are much happier with the quality of the search results they receive when searching for information for their business.

The switch to Google Custom Search was key in raising the site’s Search satisfaction score from 61 to 75, a dramatic improvement on the ACSI scale. As a result of implementing Google Custom Search and other content changes, the overall ACSI score for business.gov has risen from 63 to 74 in the past year.

“Google Custom Search is easy to maintain, update, and keep current,” said Bob Keating. “It was the right approach to take and is working very well.”

