Leading hospital boosts clinical and administrative productivity with the Google Search Appliance.

Organization
At Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, 10,000 staff, physicians, volunteers and students work to improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of people every year. The center’s vision is lofty: transform healthcare for people across the Greater Toronto Area, throughout Ontario and Canada and around the globe.

An internationally recognized leader in women’s health, academic research and education and an affiliation with the University of Toronto distinguishes Sunnybrook as one of Canada’s premier health sciences centres. Sunnybrook specializes in caring for newborns, adults and the elderly, treating and preventing cancer, heart problems, orthopaedic and arthritic conditions and traumatic injuries.

“Our focus is on discovering new treatments, ensuring the safety of our patients and teaching current and future healthcare professionals the latest theory and practice,” says Director of Information Technology Oliver Tsai.

Approach
The Sunnybrook intranet contains hundreds of thousands of documents that are crucial for clinicians and administrators at the facility, as well as for medical students in training. Clinicians – using PCs, laptops, tablets and PDAs – access everything from patient demographic information to clinical checklists and guidelines detailing patient conditions and recommended treatments. Administrators rely on the intranet to find policies and procedures as well as thousands of PDF and Microsoft Office documents housed in more than 100 Microsoft SharePoint repositories. A multimedia library delivers access to educational content such as live and archived webcasts used for student training. Everyone taps the company directory, which is based on information in Sunnybrook’s Microsoft Exchange Server. Unfortunately, finding vital content was extremely difficult. “We were using a search solution that came bundled with our web application development software,” explains Tsai. “The quality of the search results was poor. Customer satisfaction was low, and people were frustrated.”

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Tsai began looking for a new search solution. It would need to be cost-effective and streamline IT configuration time and ongoing maintenance. “IT is a very small percent of Sunnybrook’s global budget,” says Tsai. “As a hospital, we don’t necessarily have people in IT who are experts in search technology so we needed something painless to configure.”
In addition to finding an inexpensive solution that did not require a lot of effort, Tsai had another goal: enable users to search all the SharePoint repositories, the company directory as well as the multimedia library using a single search tool. He also wanted to be able to customize the search experience to suit specific audiences. Instead of purchasing an expensive content management system, Tsai’s approach was to keep search simple by using the Google Search Appliance to make all of Sunnybrook’s content easily accessible regardless of its location.

Sunnybrook started out with the Google Mini Search Appliance. Immediately, users were thrilled with the dramatic improvements in search results. Expanding on this initial success, Tsai and his team moved to the Google Search Appliance and began connecting it to various SharePoint portals and websites. “Within a day we were crawling dozens of SharePoint sites,” says Tsai. “It was truly remarkable.”

Results

Tsai says deploying the Google Search Appliance and connecting it to dozens of repositories and websites was simple to do. “With the Google Search Appliance, you are not just buying the technology, you are also buying the intelligence in the box. Bringing the Google Search Appliance online took us little time and effort,” he says.

Including the multimedia library, dozens of SharePoint portals and the company directory, the Google Search Appliance is now crawling more than 250,000 documents, putting a massive amount of information within easy reach. “The Google Search Appliance has unlocked and revealed information we didn’t know we had,” says Tsai.

Clinicians can immediately obtain high-quality search results to help them deliver more informed patient care. Medical students can readily find the educational content they need. Everyone can access the company directory using OneBox connectivity to the employee directory. Administrators can make better decisions, and they spend less time shuffling paperwork. “We previously updated policies and procedures on paper and distributed them to hundreds of different locations,” explains Tsai. “With the Google Search Appliance, we have been able to discontinue paper policies and procedures altogether. It’s a big administrative win.”
In addition, integration with Google Desktop enables all users to search for important documents on their desktops simultaneously, thereby saving considerable time.

As a next step, Sunnybrook is experimenting with creating different search front-ends tailored to the needs of various stakeholder groups. From neurology to medical imaging, the list is long of clinical services that require specialized information. Says Tsai, “We are now progressing beyond multiple repository integration to start defining and customizing users’ search interactions in the enterprise.”

Future plans also include enabling the Google Search Appliance to crawl the Sunnybrook electronic patient record system to enable physicians and clinical staff to instantly search sets of information, not only about a specific patient, but supporting ancillary and datawarehouse-driven analytics information, all through a secure, consolidated, Google-personalized Intranet. That, according to Tsai, will be one of the hospital's crowning achievements.

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