

The Google Search Appliance provides smooth flying through the intranet for 49,000 British Airway employees



At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Improve intranet search for an intranet containing 30,000 documents

What they did

- Implemented the GSA across all corporate and departmental intranet pages

What they accomplished

- Increased “Highly Satisfied” and “Satisfied” user scores from 59% to 80%
- Demonstrated via user studies that staff now can find appropriate content quicker and easier

Business

British Airways (BA) is the UK’s largest international scheduled airline, flying to more than 140 destinations and carrying almost 36 million passengers worldwide. The airline has more than 49,000 staff worldwide, the majority of which are based in the UK, and 289 aircraft, which makes it one of the largest fleets in Europe.

Challenge

Communicating effectively with staff is a challenge in any organisation, but especially in large, global companies – such as BA – where the sheer volume of people can make it hard to engage on a personal level with each and every employee. This is why tools such as intranets are vital in disseminating information quickly to staff and providing a secure archive for HR and company knowledge.

BA has had an intranet in place for ten years, which it uses primarily to share data amongst employees, and which it introduced as part of its ‘employee self-service initiative’ (ESS). 98% of staff around the world access BA’s intranet for information like training manuals, employment guides, corporate data, booking forms, payslips, HR manuals, BA news, internal communications documents, videos, and surveys.

Many of British Airways’ employees are shift-based and do not work in an office, so they need an online easy-to-search solution to locate important documents quickly and easily.

Based on regular staff surveys and user feedback, it soon became apparent to the airline that its intranet needed updating in order to manage a growing amount of information (more than 30,000 pages). More importantly, staff surveys found that people were not using the intranet because they could not find information they were looking for.

Currently there are 6.5 million page impressions a month, with 3,000 searches carried out each day by employees. Yet the biggest question employees had when asked about the intranet was: “how/where do I find XX”? As a result, they were wasting time searching ineffectively.

Matching the way people search the intranet at work to the way they search the internet at home helps to align employee self-service and customer goals.

Solution

With the backing of the ESS governing board, the company issued a tender for a new enterprise search platform.

BA selected three vendors’ offerings to look at in depth. The airline considered implementing an open source solution but it ruled this out as inappropriate to the company’s needs early on in the process. Instead, Google, the leader in

About Google Search Appliance

With the Google Search Appliance (GSA), the search experience shared by millions across the globe can be harnessed by your individual company with specific enterprise enhancements that make searching easier, intuitive, and customisable. Ready to index most enterprise content right “out of the box,” the GSA turns your company’s intranet or website search engine into a system that is as relevant and reliable as Google’s - with the same ease of use.

For more information visit:

www.google.com/intl/en_uk/enterprise/search

search technology, was selected to deliver two of its Google Search Appliances (GSA) to improve enterprise search on the company intranet.

BA was impressed with Google’s proposition and the performance of its technology in trials. Indeed, the company went so far as to conduct a user group trial using the existing structure on intranet champions. The overwhelming feedback was that Google was the winner in finding relevant content and also in presenting findings back to the user.

It helped that Google presents information in its enterprise search tool in a similar format to its Internet search engine, so users enjoy a familiar search experience. “Google’s brand was very important with end users to increase user adoption and achieve pre-acceptance,” agrees Huish. Google’s solution also offered compelling value for money.

In summary, Google was chosen based on:

- Integration
- Usability
- User feedback and suitability

In total, the implementation took three months. The Google Search Appliance is only a box, so it is very easy to install with minimal development.

Benefits

In particular, the Google KeyMatch feature is particularly useful when staff are not sure what they are searching for and organic search does not reap the results people want. For example, during training, cabin crew staff learn about Safety Equipment and Procedures (otherwise known as SEP). These are very common search terms that 14,000 people search for each year to find the relevant training materials.

Yet SEP could also be mistaken as an abbreviation for ‘September’ in an organic search, which would deliver the wrong results. Such search measures had led to user frustration, but using Google’s search engine technology, BA was able to decide on an appropriate keyword and intelligently configure it in five minutes to link up with the right word or phrase, thereby delivering accurate and relevant search results each time.

Another common search on the intranet is ‘directors of company’, but BA refers to its directors as its ‘leadership team’. Some employees may not know this, but BA can programme the GSA to link these words, thereby reducing user frustration, because even if they use the incorrect search term they are not excluded from finding the right information. So far, 200 KeyMatches have been created for such terms.

The quality of the information held on the intranet is very important in an operational environment. Using the built-in reporting facility to review the top 100 searches each month has helped to spot older or duplicated material and to fine-tune searches, so driving a higher quality intranet content.

Essentially, Google has delivered staff greater access to information, and ease of use in retrieving documents. The nature of the business BA operates in means that many of its employees are shift-based and do not work in an office, so they need an online easy-to-search solution to locate important documents quickly and easily.

The employee self service programme is worth £55 million, and the GSA is one small component to making ESS easier to use.

