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**WHITE, Martin.** *Making search work: implementing web, intranet and enterprise search.* London: Facet Publishing, 2007.  
172 pages. ISBN 978-1-85604-602-2. £44.95.

‘Search’, in the context of this book, is specifically the search function now found on most intranets and websites, and on which many organisations increasingly rely for the effective retrieval and dissemination of corporate information. Martin White, the author, is Managing Director of Intranet Focus Ltd, and an authority on the design and management of intranets. His thesis here is that organisations need to understand how the various kinds of search technology work, and how people use them, if they are to implement the most effective solution for their own organisation’s particular needs.

For even a simple search mechanism to work, complex processes are going on behind the scenes that remain invisible to the casual user. Take the indexing process for example:

*The first [element] is to enable every word to be added to the list of keywords, and to be tagged with positional information about the relationship of that word to other words in the same sentence and the frequency of the word in the document itself. The location of the word in the document may also be identified by metadata tagging, so that a search can be restricted to words that appear in just the title or the summary of a document ...*

(White, 2007, 15)

If you think about it, something of this sort must be going on in order for us to be able to conduct the kind of searches we have become used to; but of course very few of us *do* think about it, we just do it and assume that the search engine we are using is up to the task. Indexing, of course, is a crucial first step in any search process, and the quality and integrity of the index will have a direct effect on the success of the search. This applies equally whether it is an index at the back of a book produced (one hopes) by a professional indexer, or a file on a server resulting from an automated process.

The aim of a corporate search function is to enable staff in an organisation to find relevant material quickly and efficiently, saving the organisation time (and therefore money), but also avoiding duplication of effort by decreasing the risk that staff will go over material again that has already been adequately investigated by other staff elsewhere. For this to work well, it’s not simply a matter of finding the ‘answer’ to a query. The searcher may not actually know the question, let alone the answer. Search functions on many well-known websites have now become extremely intuitive, and increasingly provide us with information we didn’t even know we wanted! In the case of Amazon, for example, this is used as a marketing tool, to alert us to additional titles or other items – based on our browsing or buying history – that we may not have known about. Sometimes this is useful, but more often it is simply irritating – especially if you happen to have enquired about a specific title for a particular reason and have no interest whatsoever in related or similar titles.

The processes involved in implementing a corporate search function are extremely complex, and require careful and well-informed thought if the system is really to operate to the best advantage of the organisation. Nor is it easy to determine exactly what ‘best advantage’ means in this context. It may not be immediately obvious what the immediate benefits are, or what the advantages to be gained from investment in a more sophisticated solution may be. The author gives very helpful and clear advice on building a business case for search, which will often be the essential first step in identifying the costs involved, but will also provide the rationale for investment for senior and finance managers who are likely to be unfamiliar with the technical issues that need to be considered.

Subsequent chapters deal with the process of selecting a suitable search engine, optimizing search performance and implementing this over a range of increasingly demanding platforms, from desktop to enterprise (ie, the organisation as a whole, which in many cases will mean worldwide). The need to provide search solutions for an increasingly global environment brings yet more technical challenges in terms of multilingual capability, which the author devotes a separate chapter to.

These challenges, as anyone will know who works with information in a multilingual environment (such as, in my own case, a UK university), are not inconsiderable. The introduction of Unicode was an important breakthrough in enabling the widespread use of the various different character sets of languages other than English – such as Japanese and Hebrew. But one of the difficulties of using a search engine is ensuring correct transliteration of names in multiple languages. Information heard over the telephone translates as something quite different on paper or entered into a search engine (as I learned recently when I heard a name I registered as Cooly, but which turned out to be Quli – not even one letter correct!). The author quotes the example of Libyan President Gaddafi, whose name apparently may be written in at least 87 different ways.

For anyone who is likely to be involved in implementing intranet or enterprise search, this book will be essential reading, in a very real sense. It sets out clearly and in a logical sequence the issues involved, the factors that must be considered and the steps to be taken. It explains the terminology, and the processes going on behind the scenes that make the search function effective and productive. The Appendix contains a list of search software vendors with contact details. It has everything you need, in short, and for a book with such a high degree of technical content it is surprisingly well written.

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