IFS' Enterprise Search

CIMdata Commentary

The explosion of information available has put increasing pressure on companies to provide search tools that enable users to more easily find the information that is pertinent to their needs. For the Web, companies like Google, Alta Vista, Microsoft, and many others have developed comprehensive search engines that enable users to search across multiple sites and sources. Initially, these tools simply returned links to any site or URL that contained any part of the input search criteria, and in many cases, users would have to look through a mass of results to find the desired information. Recently, developers of search tools have been adding technologies that constrain or filter the results in order to provide users with a more focused set of results. This is improving the usability of search tools and reducing the time spent in finding pertinent information and links.

As companies have improved their business information systems and added more enterprise applications, the need to provide more effective internal search tools has become more critical. Each company has both focused and enterprise applications. Focused applications are used by a small group of personnel or for a specific business function. Enterprise applications are used by many persons throughout the company and potentially its suppliers, partners, and customers. Enterprise applications are, in some ways, similar to the public Internet as they connect digital information and processes throughout a company, uniting islands of information into a single logical information universe and business environment.

All applications have some type of search capabilities. Focused applications tend to constrain search facilities to looking within the data managed or used by that application and assume that the user (usually a person who uses the application frequently) understands what they are looking for and the context within which they will search. Enterprise applications provide a much broader search capability. Both power and casual users will need to perform searches and these may span a wide range of information or aggregate many criteria into a single search request.

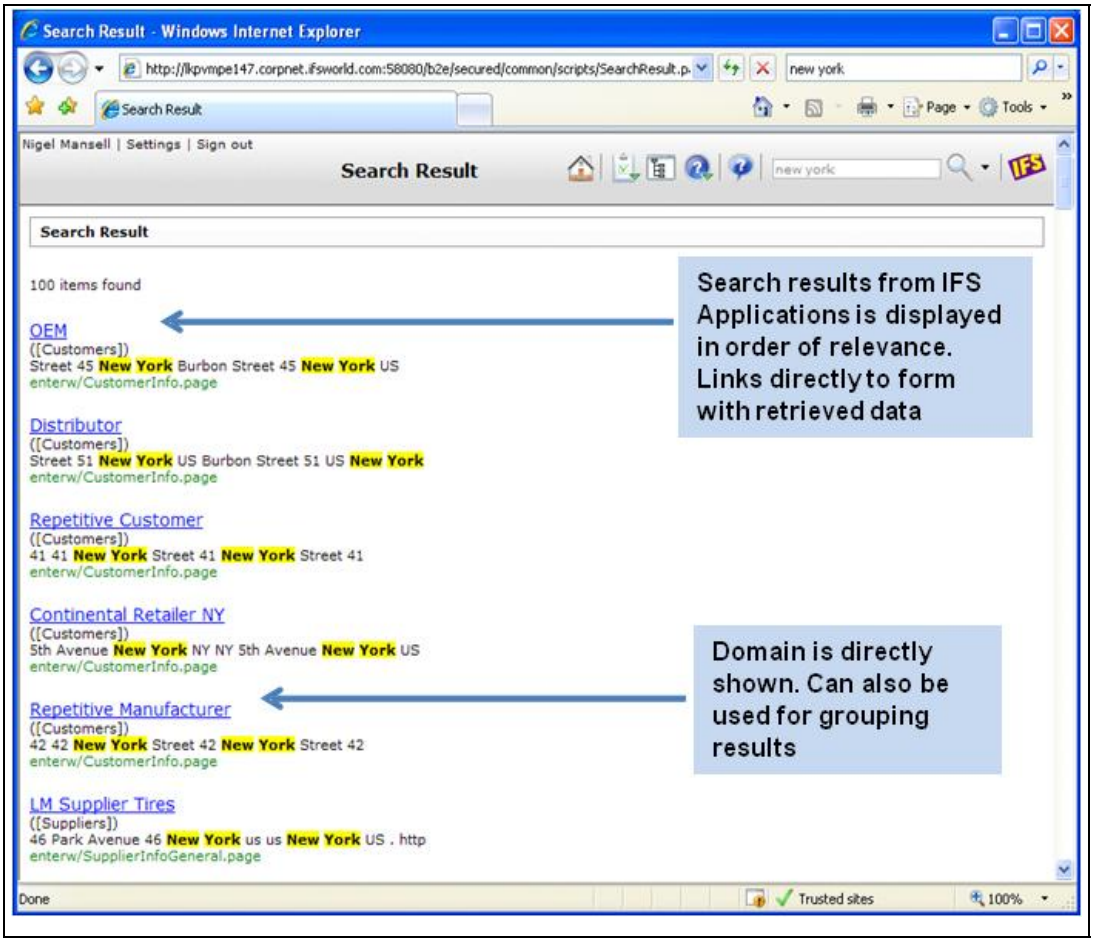
Applications feature some type of navigational structure to help users surf among different screens and functions. For many enterprise applications, in order to find information in the business application, users need to know where it is. With enough knowledge and experience in how the enterprise application is configured, users can find what they are looking for. This search method is probably an acceptable way for frequent users of a system to search for a specific piece of information. However, it does not work that well for the occasional user of a system—or even for a heavy user of the system who is searching an application in an area with which they are not intimately familiar. Because enterprise applications are so broad and cover so many different disciplines within a company, it is hard for any one person to have a thorough understanding of even a majority of an application's functionality.

IFS has addressed these issues by embedding a comprehensive enterprise search capability within its application suite in which the search capabilities are integrated as a component within the application. It provides Google-style searching across the complete IFS suite of business applications—a deep search capability that makes all the information

within the IFS application suite easily searchable through a unified interface. Advantages of IFS' integrated enterprise application search include:

- **Context**–The search engine can use contextual information including data on what tasks that user has been performing in the applications to deliver more targeted results. This concept can also be applied to business process context, so that if a system user is involved in finance-related functions, results that conform to their organizational role can be accentuated.
- **Intent**–Because enterprise application search has full knowledge of the application meta-data (information about information) users can express the intent of a search in simple, well-understood, business terms such as "customer information," "order data," "product data," or other descriptors.
- **Security**–IFS role and data security is applied to all search results, which means search results are only visible to people with the proper user permissions to view that data. For instance, general ledger data, closely guarded in both publicly- and privately-held companies, is automatically protected from unauthorized viewers.
- **Hybrid Search**–Users can combine enterprise context search with traditional meta data search into a single query to deliver the best of both search methods at once.
- **Cost**–Because the enterprise application search tool is integrated into an application, it does not carry additional software licensing and hardware fees or additional integration services.

The following picture illustrates an IFS enterprise search in which the results are displayed in order of relevance.



CIMdata believes that the IFS enterprise search provides a significantly improved capability for their users. This search facility enables users of all levels to work within their daily applications and obtain highly-relevant and immediately useful search outcomes, resulting in more productive users and a more efficient and effective workforce.

About CIMdata

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