QAD implements universal search with the Google Search Appliance to improve service for a global customer base

At a Glance

What they wanted to do
- Provide secure universal search across multiple repositories
- Support the information needs of employees, customers and the public
- Streamline IT efforts and reduce costs related to search
- Enhance customer support through improved relevance

What they did
- Worked with Google and Perficient to implement the Google Search Appliance for universal search across all content repositories and sources

What they accomplished
- Provided enterprise search that connects customers and employees with the right content
- Kept sensitive manufacturing information secure
- Improved search relevance across all content sources, down to the granular level
- Increased employee and customer satisfaction

Company

QAD was founded in 1979 with a singular vision: to develop software exclusively for manufacturing companies. Today, more than 5,500 manufacturers in 93 countries use the company's supply chain collaboration products for the automotive, consumer packaged goods, food and beverage, high tech, industrial products and life sciences industries. QAD employs more than 1,300 people, with operations in 30 different locations around the world, from the corporate office in Santa Barbara, California to South Africa to Poland to Thailand.

Challenge

Many companies choose QAD for its global manufacturing focus and multinational support. Over half of the company's revenue is derived outside the United States. "We pride ourselves on the quality of support we deliver to thousands of manufacturers in 27 languages," explains Scott Lawson, director of IT architecture at QAD. "Adding to the complexity, we offer more than 50 different product modules that are installed in building blocks to support different rules, industry regulations and manufacturing styles of different countries."

As a competitive imperative, QAD must provide easy access to complex, detailed product information to customer service representatives and others within the organization. Customers, too, need easy access to information. QAD offers a secure extranet for manufacturing customers seeking information such as white papers, data sheets, support ticket statuses and technical updates. In addition, QAD's public website also provides everything from case studies to product demonstration videos, as well as an online support center.

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—Bob Ward, IT engineer, QAD

Traditionally, it was challenging for internal and external audiences to find the right product and service information. Data at QAD is stored in many different repositories–Lotus Notes, an enterprise content management and collaboration system, a knowledgebase, file shares, QAD's own customer service and support system and a range of web sites. Likewise, QAD content had grown organically creating alignment and indexing challenges.

QAD was using an Autonomy search system for its intranet and Internet, but it was not meeting user expectations for usability and search relevancy. Adding to the challenge, Autonomy was time-consuming and costly for IT to maintain. "Autonomy was moderately successful at searching across repositories, but it was expensive, with a lot of moving parts and complex licensing," says Niall O'Grady, IT programmer/analyst at QAD. "Adding new features was expensive and required buying an extra module with yet another license and then having to integrate it with the other Autonomy modules."

Solution

In 2010, QAD adopted Google Apps for its for communication and collaboration. After employees began working with tools such as Gmail and Google Calendar, they began asking for Google's signature ease-of-use and power for search as well. "Employees and customers were telling us: 'Our search engine doesn't work like Google or like the Internet,'" says Bob Ward, IT engineer at QAD.

Google's simple yet powerful search prompted QAD to consider replacing the Autonomy system with the Google Search Appliance (GSA). The GSA was capable of connecting into legacy enterprise systems and providing advanced security and multiple language support–all important priorities for our business," says Lawson.

The company worked with Google partner Perficient to implement the GSA across QAD's intranet, Internet and customer extranet sites. "We saw that QAD had a complex information environment, one that the Google Search Appliance could simplify, both for information-seekers and for IT," says Chad Johnson, Google practice manager for Perficient.

The POC delivered by Perficient proved that the GSA was capable of searching across all of QAD's complex repositories in multiple languages with a high degree of relevancy – all with the simplicity and familiar interface Google users have come to expect.

Obtaining relevant results from one search box was a major aim in order to increase productivity and customer satisfaction. At the same time, security was paramount because QAD must protect sensitive information such as manufacturing processes and product designs. Working closely with QAD's IT development team, Perficient set up a security model for all of QAD's systems that featured the convenience of single-sign on across multiple repositories, while ensuring that designated content could only be accessed by authenticated users. The team integrated authentication technologies from PistolStar with the GSA for increased usability, security, auditing and compliance.

Results

According to O'Grady, the GSA were simple to implement, and have been easy to maintain, especially because the appliances feature a "one stop" administrative interface for configuration and index controls. "There's no such concept as a single console in Autonomy," says O'Grady. "The administrative interface in the GSA makes it much easier to configure and manage the details related to search."

He adds that Google and Perficient are highly knowledgeable and responsive to customer needs, a huge benefit when implementing and managing a universal search solution. From a business perspective, the

About the Google Search Appliance

The Google Search Appliance (GSA) is an integrated hardware and software search solution that extends Google's award-winning search technology to websites of all kinds, including corporate sites and intranets. Organizations can use Google Search Appliance to make data on servers, content management systems, databases and business applications instantly and securely available from a single familiar search box. More than 35,000 companies worldwide use Google Enterprise search solutions.

For more information visit
www.google.com/gsa

GSA provides features such as auto-completion to help business users find what they need – a feature that would have required installing an extra module and license with Autonomy. Continual, integrated enhancements from Google come at no extra charge.

For QAD, search-related costs are down, search relevancy is up – and IT is doing less work to support a global organization that relies heavily on its ability to find information. Customer service representatives can easily locate details about products and services, and customers can easily search the extranet for everything from status support tickets to development documentation. Reporting has also improved, because information is easier to find.

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With the GSA, QAD is empowering internal and external users to search on attributes as granular as an author's name across virtually every repository at QAD. Users report that the results are highly relevant. And the robust security model is helping to ensure that only authorized users can access product designs and other sensitive information. "Because we support so many different types of manufacturers, our content needs to be targeted to each discrete customer," says Lawson. "With the GSA, we are linking communities of employees and customers together with content into a cohesive experience. It has made QAD even more of a unified global company."