



The State of Baden-Wuerttemberg delivers easy access to complex data, increasing user engagement and regulatory compliance, with the Google Search Appliance

AT A GLANCE

What they wanted to do:

- Make complex data stored in a variety of formats and repositories available to users with all levels of technological expertise

What they did:

- Implemented the Google Search Appliance as the cornerstone of a new search-based website strategy

What they accomplished:

- Made information findable and useful for power users and the general public
 - Allowed information that was previously “unfindable” to be easily accessed through a familiar, hassle-free user interface
 - Consolidated multiple repositories of complex data while enabling relevant search results
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Umweltministerium



Baden-Württemberg

Background

The Environment Ministry of the German state of Baden-Wuerttemberg strives to enhance long-term preservation of natural environments, safeguarding the state’s appeal for residents and businesses. Working with the State Institute for Environment, Measurements and Nature Conservation Baden-Wuerttemberg (LUBW) it actively informs the local population about environmental issues and opportunities through its environmental information system and information portal, www.umwelt-bw.de. That portal delivers a complex range of information, including overviews on environmental protection and preservation, detailed reports and guides suitable for specialists, and reports from various state-wide monitoring networks. The information comes from a wide range of sources and formats, but still must be easily available to users – from the most casual site visitor to power users who base decisions and actions upon the information they find on this site.

Challenge

The EU requires government agencies to make environmental information easily and publicly available, and to publish and disseminate this information in ways that people can easily find and use. Web publishing has made this easier – yet the diverse formats in which environmental information is captured create challenges when it comes to streamlining access to that information. When the source information is published in databases or in complex formats, it’s difficult for users – especially casual users – to find. Search capabilities offered a solution – but complex search forms were simply not an option for a public-facing website. The Environment Ministry of Baden-Wuerttemberg needed a way to make a wide array of quantitative and qualitative information from several hundred official sources easily available and understandable to all users, from citizens to researchers.

The State and LUBW offices teamed up to explore the options and design a completely new online environmental information portal. Collaborating with the environmental ministries of nearby Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia, Baden-Wuerttemberg launched a cooperative project aimed at creating a uniform technical experience delivering environmental data from many sources to users of all kinds. It was clear early on that LUBW’s existing Open Source search engine would not deliver the results the new project needed. The complexities of including the two other states stretched the existing solution’s capabilities; even on its own, LUBW saw room for improvement. Irrelevant or unintelligible search results and the inability to deliver content from environmental databases just wouldn’t work as the system grew in use and importance to its various audiences. After scanning the market for suitable search engines, LUBW saw that the Google Search Appliance was the solution best suited to the task.

“Working with the Google Search Appliance is fun. It’s really quick and easy to use, and delivers excellent results”

Thorsten Schlachter, Developer, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

With “simple access to environmental information” as the primary goal, the LUBW team insisted that search should be easy and relevant, in keeping with public expectations with full-text internet search. The next goal was to streamline search

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. Organisations 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 20,000 companies worldwide use Google Enterprise search solutions.

For more information, visit
www.google.com/gsa

for internal users, speeding access to staff across the regions and helping them optimise productivity by getting the right information the first time around.

The Google Search Appliance addressed both of these needs. Because of the familiar Google search box that had already defined most online search behavior, the team agreed that implementation and uptake would be easy for all involved. The relevance and speed of results also gained their support, since they wanted users to receive as many relevant results as possible with a minimum of effort.

Solution

Düsseldorf-based Google Enterprise partner TWT installed the Google Search Appliance for LUBW in late 2007. Initial test results were extremely positive. Within a short time, a number of previously undiscovered errors – dead links, redundant sites – were found by an analysis tool integrated in the Google Search Appliance's administration components, helping internal teams literally “clean up” results. Initial indexing and searches happened rapidly, and within three weeks of conducting an introductory workshop, the first of the three environmental portals (complete with full-text index and filters) was released for testing. Successfully searching across content from some 250,000 webpages, including the LUBW environmental databases and data catalogue resulted in the Google Search Appliance passing the first quarter test and the project moved toward full implementation. Approximately 500,000 webpages and database entries are now available for searching, while each search term is automatically expanded by synonyms out of an environmental thesaurus.

Expectations from the Environment Ministry and LUBW – including ease of use, simple administration and maintenance, improvement of hit relevance, and separation of the search service into three separate areas so that users found results from the right state - be it Baden-Wuerttemberg, Saxony-Anhalt, or Thuringia, were met.

Results

Immediately after the portal was released for testing, webmasters from the ministry and state institutions started using the Google Search Appliance's front-end to make it quicker and easier to deliver the information they were looking for. Acceptance and motivation levels across project staff remain high on all accounts.

Thorsten Schlachter of the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, who developed the environmental information portals, says, “Working with the Google Search Appliance is fun. It's really quick and easy to use, and delivers excellent results.” Project head Renate Ebel of LUBW is equally enthusiastic about the “environmental Google” and is always receiving queries from interested parties about the successful project. The environmental portal officially launched to the German public in July 2008, under the leadership of Baden-Wuerttemberg's Environment Minister Tanja Gönner. The organisation looks forward to reporting on public use and satisfaction in keeping with internal enthusiasm for the Google Search Appliance as an improvement in the access of key environmental information.

