



# FT.com

World's leading  
business website uses  
FAST search technology  
to boost traffic and  
improve quality

A FAST customer success story





## FT.com

### Headquarters:

London, England

**Core business:** FT.com provides UK and international business, finance, economic and political news, comment and analysis from the Financial Times.

**Objective:** To provide a search resource using FAST Enterprise Search Platform (ESP) that complements the FT.com site by providing accurate, relevant search results from the continually updated FT archive of business, finance and political news and comment. FT.com's audience includes world leading business decision makers, and Search needs to be quick, intuitive and relevant to meet users needs.

### Solution

FAST ESP®

### Benefits

- Search usage increased substantially following launch of the FAST-based service
- Higher user satisfaction with the Search service reflected in comments and feedback to customer services
- Complex search entry replaced by ease of use and greater relevance of results
- Search performance supports continued growth of FT.com site

## FT.com

Having successfully run the FT.com site for many years, FT decided it was time to review the technology and update its search capabilities to enhance the online user experience and investigate new monetisation models.

The Financial Times was ranked 7th in the 2008 annual list of business superbrands by the Business Superbrands Council; a rise of 11 places. The FT's digital presence, FT.com - the world's most popular audited business website - combines agenda-setting editorial with relevant financial data and discussion groups. It also features a broad range of business tools including a five year FT content search, extensive international markets data and personal portfolio.

FT.com is the definitive home for business intelligence on the web, providing an essential source of news, comment, data and analysis for the global business community. FT.com attracts 7.1 million unique users, generating 72 million page views. FT.com has 101,000 subscribers.

### Challenge

FT.com attracts business users that trust the FT brand for quality of comment and analysis as well as news. The expectation of its users, often working in demanding, fast-moving environments is that they will effortlessly find the quality and quantity of information they require. The efficiency and performance of the site is consequently an important factor that reflects on the overall FT brand.

The FT.com site had been running for many years with a fairly advanced archive search facility. However, the user interface had become very dated, and the underlying technology was increasingly underpowered for the kinds of features that FT wished to introduce. Thus, around three years ago, the company decided that it was time to review the technology and update its search capabilities so it could ultimately enhance the online user experience and investigate new monetisation models.

"The technology we originally deployed served well when FT.com's Search was launched, but both technology and customer expectations had significantly moved on," said Dalmon.

The FT.com team reviewed the search market reviewing solutions from both large established players and smaller specialist vendors. Each company was judged on three criteria - how well their systems performed; how their technical architecture fitted with the FT's; and how well they could work as a business partner. FAST not only exceeded the FT's expectations on the above three criteria but also delivered a working prototype search system within 10 days.

"We chose FAST because our rigorous market tests proved they had the best search technology available for our requirements. As FAST emerged top in nearly every aspect of the study, it was an easy decision to select the FAST ESP platform to provide a new generation of search engine for FT.com. From an industry perspective, FAST demonstrated its deep understanding and proven expertise in delivering the type of solution required by a global media company and could easily handle a dynamic database that is constantly being updated. Our job is to ensure the real-time content is available and that this, along with the archive are searched with the same speed and accuracy. FAST allows us to do that," said Dalmon.

### Solution

The first phase of the project began in May 2006, when the FAST solution was deployed to replace the previous search technology, but without changing any of the actual features of the site.

This helped FT.com to size the engine correctly whilst allowing the FT's technical team to prepare for the introduction of new features.

FAST Business Services, part of FAST's Search Business Consultancy (SBC) team, was subsequently engaged to work with the FT.com team. At the same time, a member of the FT.com's staff joined the FAST University on a specialised programme to ensure there was a full skills transfer to maximise the use of the new technology.

Once the second phase of the system went live at the end of July 2006, a dramatic improvement to the overall search facility was achieved. Visitors were suddenly experiencing a much more user-friendly interface to enable access to a much wider range of archived information.

"The effects of the FAST implementation were dramatic and swift. By October 2006, the use of the search tool had increased substantially, and people were staying on the site longer as they were finding the information they wanted," said Dalmon.

Early in 2007, the third phase of the project was executed, replacing the previous 'power search' interface with a range of interactive search features, which allow users to filter their personal results

Users now had the ability to re-order results by date and also the sophisticated taxonomy allowed associated results to be presented and display connections to related people, companies, topics or places. Content was also further enhanced with the inclusion of video clips, interviews and multimedia advertisements. A 'date slider' feature allows users to visualise the volume of news published by FT over time for their search query.

"People don't really want to search. They want to find answers and potentially discover associated information. Our visitors tend to be time-poor so they

need immediate access to important information as quickly as possible. The surge in popularity of search on the site proves just what a critical investment the implementation of the right enterprise Search solution has been for FT.com," said Dalmon.

In October 2007, FT.com launched a new access model to open up FT.com content to a wider audience. This change allows free access to 30 stories per month including news, analysis, comment, columnists and other premium content through a light-touch registration process.

The scalability of the product was extremely important to the success of FT.com. "The more usage we get, the more we can monetise our content. The more page views Search attracts, the more our advertisers will be seen," said Dalmon.

#### Benefits and results

FAST's Search solution is not only a major improvement over its predecessor, but it has also provided a scalable search platform to support FT.com's achievement to become one of the world's fastest growing business websites. Not only does search give access to the entire FT.com archive, its clear interface allows users to find what they need quickly and then to filter down results even further by specifying aspects of the subject that interests them. The new features and better interface have boosted traffic substantially since implementation, with a proportional increase in advertising revenues and subscription activity.

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**"We chose FAST because our rigorous market tests proved they have the best search technology for our requirements," said Diane Dalmon, head of research products, Financial Times.**

#### Diane Dalmon

Head of Research Products  
Financial Times

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