

Case Study

The Electoral Commission

How the Electoral Commission made its information more accessible and improved customer service with Funnelback website search



The Organisation

Integrity & Public Confidence

The Electoral Commission is an independent organisation set up by UK Parliament.

Its aim is to ensure integrity and public confidence in the country's democratic process. Its main activities include registering political parties, administering rules and guidance on party and election finance, and publishing details of party and candidate funding. The Commission also sets out the standards and policies for running elections, and reports on the implementation of those standards across all the political parties. The job of communicating the importance of registering to vote, and how to do so, also lies with the Commission.



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Chrystyna Chymera
Senior Corporate Communications Officer



The Challenge

Delivering Information

The Electoral Commission is by nature a content heavy organisation. It holds thousands of documents, forms, guidance and information essential to the UK's electoral process. Its challenge is to deliver that information quickly and easily via searches on its website.

Its website users include political parties; election staff and campaigners; journalists; local authorities; academia; and other public sector workers, all of whom perform around 35,000 individual searches on the Commission's website per month*.

The organisation's Senior Corporate Communications Officer (Digital Media) Chrystyna Chymera, explained more about the Commission's challenges: "We have so much content, and a lot of it is statutory information, so it's absolutely essential to those who are involved in elections in any way or those who want to know more about them. With our previous search system it was taking website visitors too long to find what they were looking for. It was very slow and search results were not relevant enough. They ended up giving up on their searches and we were taking lots of calls asking for content that was actually available on the website, but just not easily accessible."

Chrystyna continued: "Because of the amount of content we hold, we didn't stand a chance with a basic search engine. We needed a system that could deliver rapid and relevant results and a great customer experience."

*Search statistics recorded by Funnelback, January 2010

The Solution

Powerful Features & Functionality

The Electoral Commission was already using Squiz's Content Management System, MySource Matrix, and selected Squiz's Funnelback Search solution because of its powerful features and functionality.

Funnelback Search offers a host of features such as results filtering, relevancy tuning, user rating, multi-lingual search and advanced multi-parameter search. Funnelback's 'Contextual Navigation' is also a key feature. It offers dynamic clustering of search results, allowing users to refine their search results to easily find the information they require. These and other performance enhancing features all work to improve navigation, user experience and the speed of information retrieval (see the image on page 5 for examples of some of these features from the Electoral Commission website).

Chrystyna commented: "We hoped Funnelback would really empower our website users to find relevant search results more quickly."

The screenshot shows the search results page for 'election' on the Electoral Commission website. The page displays a list of search results with various annotations highlighting user search features:

- Welsh Results:** A red box highlights the 'Cymraeg' tab in the search filters.
- Advanced Search:** A red box highlights the search bar and the 'Advanced search' link.
- Featured Pages:** A red box highlights the 'Featured Items' sidebar section.
- Contextual Navigation:** A red box highlights the 'Similar results' sidebar section.
- Related forms & guidance:** A red box highlights the 'Related forms & guidance' sidebar section.
- File Type and Size:** A red box highlights the 'Type' and 'File size' information for the first search result.
- User ratings for search results:** A red box highlights the star rating and feedback icons for the first search result.
- Highlighted Search Term:** A red box highlights the search term 'election' in the search bar.

Welsh Results

Tabs to refine search results

File Type and Size

User ratings for search results

Highlighted Search Term

Advanced Search

Featured Pages

Contextual Navigation

Most Popular

- Registered parties >
- Finance of parties >
- Electoral roll >

Featured Items

- The European Parliamentary and local government elections 2009 >

Similar results

- Topics around election >
- ...Finance >
- ...Result >
- Party Election Broadcasts >
- ...Campaign >
- ...Maps Website >
- Different types of election >
- General... >
- Government... >
- Mayoral... >

Related forms & guidance

- UKPE - Election essentials >
- Plymouth draft recommendations >
- Nomination forms for candidates at parish elections >
- View more items >

Search Showing 1 - 10 of 1,100 search results.

Current search: Search Advanced search +

- All results
- News releases
- Publications
- Cymraeg

Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland UKPEE pre-election seminar presentation

Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland UK general election pre-election seminar presentation - March 2010

Type: Presentation/speech File size: 125.9 kb 30 Mar 2010

England combined elections (2-member wards) (England combined elections (2-member wards))

For use in England where the general election is combined with local election for 2-member wards.

Type: Do Politics materials File size: 862.9 kb 29 Mar 2010

UK Parliamentary elections

This page introduces our guidance products for UK Parliamentary elections

Section: Guidance 3 Mar 2008

General election 2010 - the countdown is on

With a UK Parliamentary general election to take place by 3 June, 2010 will be an important year for voters and all those involved in planning, running and campaigning in elections...

Section: Elections 27 Jan 2010

Royal Mail Northern Ireland pre-election seminar presentation

Royal Mail presentation for Northern Ireland UK general election pre-election seminar - March 2010

Type: Presentation/speech File size: 427.3 kb 30 Mar 2010



Being able to provide appropriate results for the different audiences is really important to the Commission. You get hundreds, maybe thousands of results for certain terms but what the Funnelback system can do is give options to refine the search results, and provide advice on which additional or alternative words they could try to retrieve better results.

Chrystyna Chymera
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The Results

Greater Control, Better Results

Chrystyna went on to explain the direct impact of the new system on the organisation and its customers: “We have a number of different website visitor groups, but the terminology used by them when searching for completely different things can be very similar. For example, ‘postal votes’ is a common search term, but some visitors will be looking for information about how they can register for, or complete, a postal vote, others will want news releases on postal votes, and some will want to know how to administer a postal vote. A simple search engine can’t consider any of that.”

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“We also had a problem previously that people couldn’t distinguish between the types or formats of data that were being returned – whether it was web data, pdf, forms, spreadsheets etc – but now there are icons that clearly show what that data is. It’s a lot more user friendly.”

But the most beneficial aspect of the new functionality to the team is the ability to influence the results. Chrystyna said: “Now we can drive people straight to specific pieces of content when we need to. There are a number of tricks we can perform to influence where content appears in the rankings. For example, when we upload something new we can send it straight to the top of the rankings if we need to. So, if there’s one key document I know everyone is going to need, I can tag it against a set of search terms and it will automatically go to the top of the results for those terms. It’s not to be used for everything, but as a special emergency measure it’s really powerful.”

Other benefits to the Commission include the ability to separate content by language. Until the new Funnelback system was installed, English and Welsh content was being combined without giving users a choice. Now the content is separated so that users can select which language they prefer their results in.

Another problem Funnelback has been able to solve is the ability to search across all three of the Commission's databases – only two were being included in the search results previously, leaving important content out in the cold. Also, whenever a content change is made in the MySource Matrix CMS, or any of the databases, the Funnelback search index is automatically updated to ensure that results are always accurate and right up to date.

The improved search, new features and greater degree of administrative control have had a significant impact on the performance of the Electoral Commission's website. Conversion rates have increased from 22% at the beginning of the project, to 52% after just three months, while clicks on featured pages have more than tripled.

Chrystyna finished by saying: "Our editors and managers are pleased with the enhanced control over the system and their ability to influence it. In the past, if there were any issues with search, there was absolutely nothing we could do about it. But now we have much more control. Our website visitors are also happier, especially with the speed of the service. It's been a massive boost. We now have a speedy and comprehensive customer search experience."



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