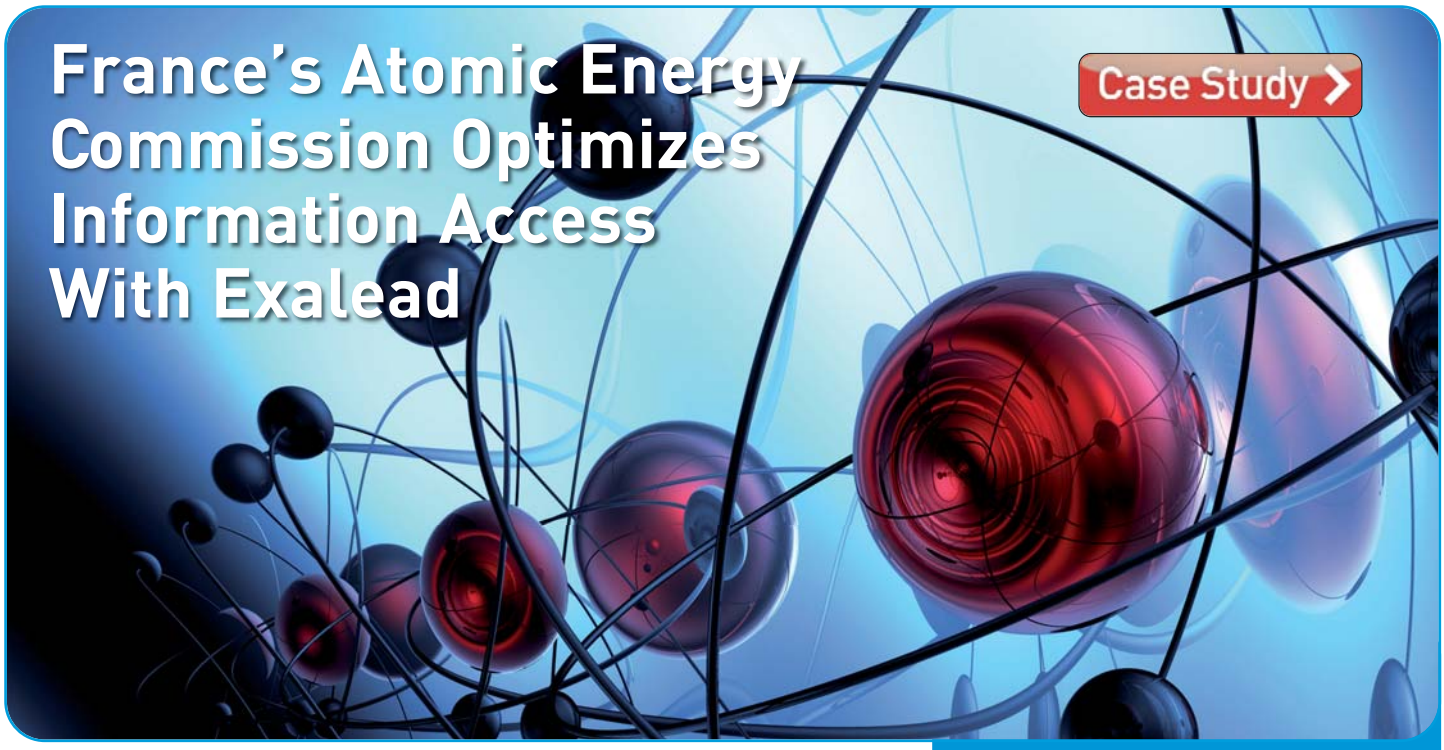
France's Atomic Energy Commission Optimizes Information Access With Exalead

Case Study



About CEA

France's Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) conducts fundamental and applied research with the use of atomic energy in the domains of science, industry and national defense. It's one of the most important public research organizations in the world, with more than 15,000 internationally acclaimed researchers and collaborators working at nine principal research centers: five civilian and four military. CEA's five civilian centers host more than 150 intranets accessed by more than 10,000 users. Located in 9 research centers spread throughout France, CEA benefits from a strong regional presence and solid partnerships with other research organizations. Known as an expert in their field, CEA is firmly placed in the European search market and never ceases to grow it's presence in the international arena.

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At-a-Glance

Business Problem

- Needed a solution that could index more than 50,000 documents to handle their growing business
- Needed an updated search interface that was easy to navigate
- Wanted a unified solution to search across all databases, intranets and sources
- Sought automated, flexible management tools

Exalead Benefits

- Boosts organizational knowledge
- Fosters collaboration
- Reduced work hours spent on basic information searches
- Eased the management burden on IT
- Added value beyond expectations
- Enhances the search experience

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CEA's Search Interface

CEA's Challenge: Unifying Acess to 150 Intranets

France's Atomic Energy Commission ("Commissariat à l'Energie Atomique," or CEA, in French) was created at the end of the Second World War to conduct fundamental and applied research into the use of atomic energy in the domains of science, industry and national defense.

It is one of the most important public research organizations in the world, with more than 15,000 internationally acclaimed researchers and collaborators working at nine principal research centers: five civilian and four military. CEA's five civilian centers host more than 150 intranets accessed by more than 10,000 users. CEA selected Exalead CloudView™ Search Edition to unify information access across these civilian intranets.

"Over the last few years, we have witnessed a veritable explosion in the number of intranet sites," states Christine Iooss, Project Director in CEA's Information Systems Division. "Each of the five civilian centers offers its own central information portal, and within each center, an ever-increasing number of individual departments, service units and laboratories also require their own intranet sites. "Given the dynamic level of activity at CEA's centers, it's difficult to determine the exact volume of content, but we estimate our intranets host around 200,000 documents, 20% of which are desktop files, with the other 80% being HTML web pages" Iooss continues.

"These intranets have come to play a central role in the daily activities of CEA employees. They quickly became essential tools for communication and document exchange. Our challenge, meanwhile, was keeping the content accessible in the face of this rapid growth. We had already been using a search engine utility to facilitate access to our principal intranet portals, but that tool had reached its performance limits," states Iooss.

> "The scalability of the Exalead solution has made it possible to offer our users a unified platform for accessing all intranet content. With this unified platform has come a new global view of the organization. Users are able to tap into and help build organizational knowledge in a novel way, and they are finding new avenues and partners for collaboration."
>
> **– Christine IOOSS, Project Director in CEA's Information Systems Division**

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Selection Criteria

"Our existing search tool couldn't index more than 50,000 documents - 25% of our current estimated volume. What's more, the tool's cumbersome interface was becoming increasingly unpopular with our users as they became more accustomed to easy-to-use Internet search tools. Therefore, we launched our quest for a new search solution with a few major requirements," Iooss states.

The new tool had to:

- Scale to cover all our intranet sites
- Offer more pertinent results
- Index a constantly growing and evolving body of data
- Aid users in navigating the research results, rather than abandoning them to a long list of links
- Provide automated yet flexible management tools

The Exalead Choice

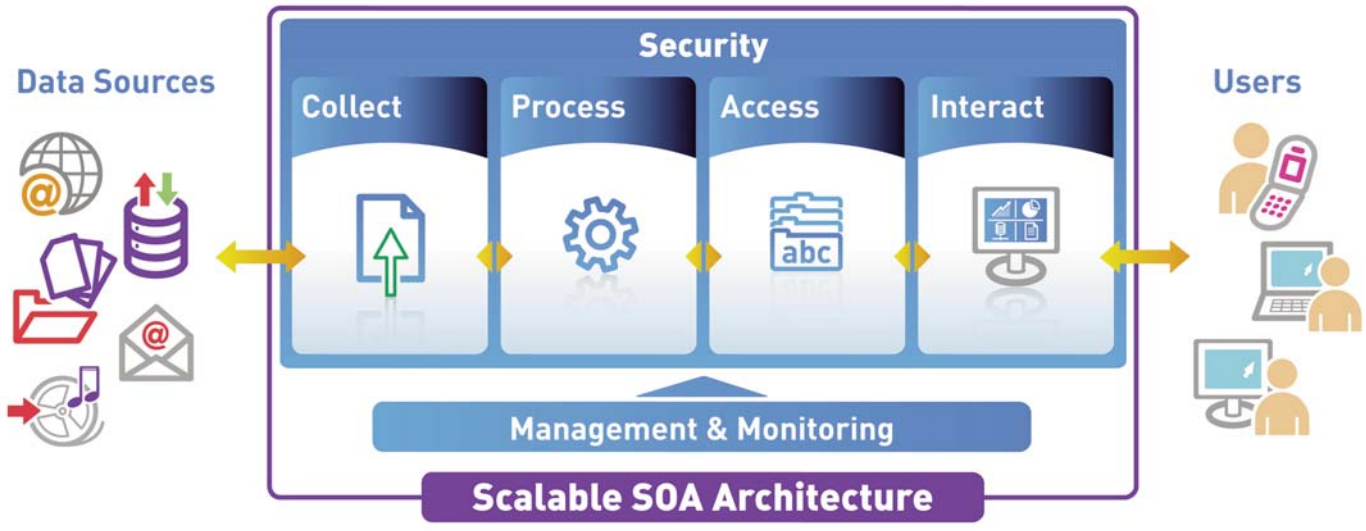
CEA launched a request for proposals, and requested application prototypes from the leading six respondents. The prototypes were to index 50,000 documents spread across 30 intranet sites. Two of the bidders stumbled over technical problems during the indexing phase, encountering performance issues when indexing office documents. For the remaining bidders, CEA next analyzed the relevance of the search results using a base of 20 search requests. This evaluation was complemented by end user tests, which aided CEA in pinpointing user expectations, in particular regarding the product interface.

"Exalead immediately rose to the fore based on scalability, results relevancy and query response speed, moreover the users preferred an interface that was web-like. Fortunately, Exalead was in the process of testing the new interface for its public search engine at www.exalead.com, and we were able to give our users a sneak preview of this interface. That interface, combined with the Exalead's performance, allowed us to offer our users 100% satisfaction."

"Exalead CloudView™ perfectly fulfills the requirements for which we selected it. We also know that we now possess a powerful and scalable tool with which we can respond to any number of information access needs that may arise in the years to come..."

– Christine IOOSS
CEA IS Project Director, Search Engine Expert

CloudView Architecture



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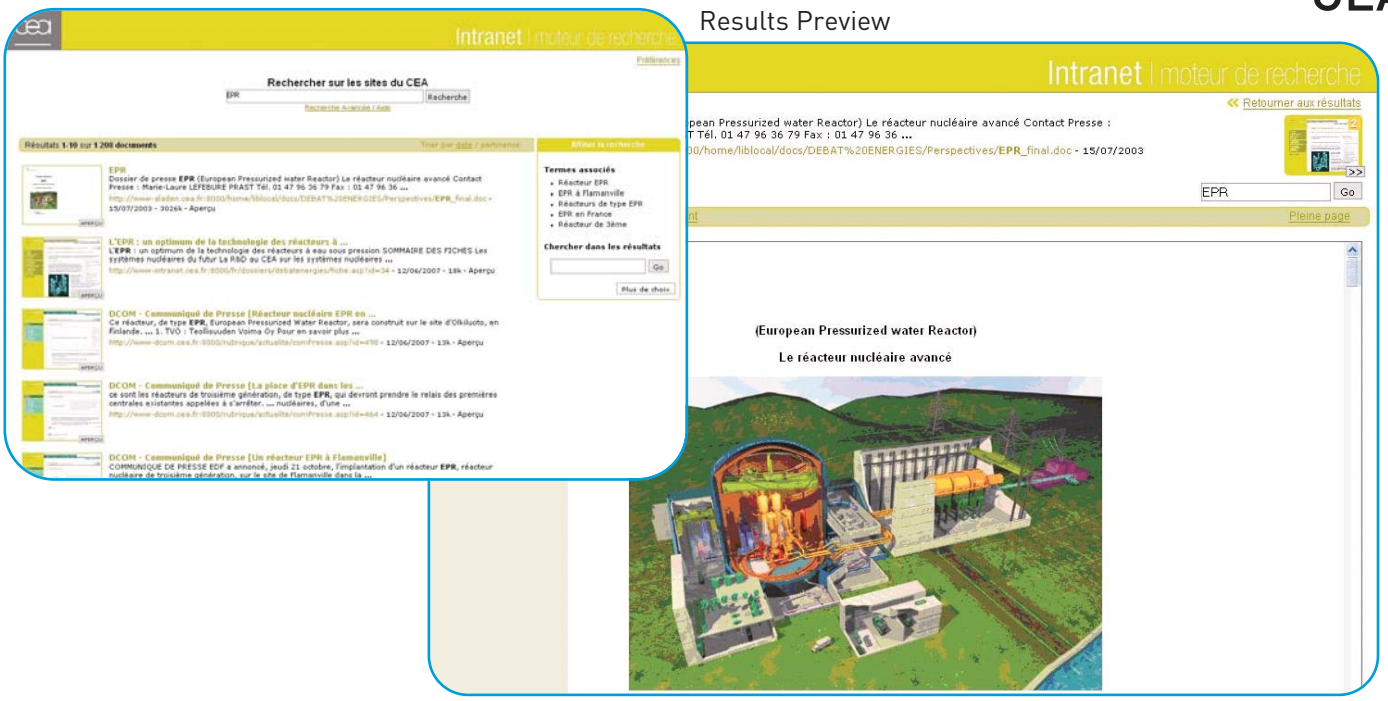

Results Preview

Deployment

"For those of us working in IT, the Exalead solution offers both the automation we need and the flexibility to fine-tune performance. For example, our intranet managers can include their site in the index using a simple site submission form. Upstream, we help them define content zones and optimize the search engine's indexation of their sites through tools such as site maps and a "robots.txt" file."

The Exalead Response

"Our end users can also now find basic organizational information much faster, freeing up time for more valuable work. This has been made possible by: 1) flexible source targeting, 2) improved results relevancy, and 3) a highly structured yet simple-to-use interface."

"First, we were able to configure the tool to reflect CEA's organizational structure and its corresponding intranet sites. Users can therefore narrow or broaden their searches at will, widening their requests to encompass all sources or limiting them to one or several sources."

"Second, the Exalead platform offers users much more relevant results through its proprietary navigation technology, Search by Serendipity®, as well as the indexing options it offers administrators. We're working on highlighting particularly pertinent pages in the same way sponsored links are foregrounded on public search engines, and we are equally interested in factoring synonyms into the requests."

"Third, the clean web-style interface, the extensive navigational options for refining searches, and the rich content previews have all made the search process not only faster, but more enjoyable as well,"looss continues. "In sum, whether considered from a management, technology or end user viewpoint, CloudView perfectly fulfills the requirements for which we selected it."

"We also know that we now possess a powerful and scalable tool with which we can respond to any number of information access needs that may arise in the years to come," states Christine looss, Project Director.

What's Next

Following the deployment of Exalead CloudView across the civilian intranets of CEA, other entities within the group have adopted the solution in response to unique individual needs, like the Cadarache center for its bibliographic databases. More projects are underway...

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