



NEWS

FLAX

## Building bridges in the Cloud with **flax**

C Spencer Ltd manages and engineers projects across the UK and overseas in the rail, structures and renewable energy sectors. With 22 years' experience, they have more than 300 staff throughout the country. Their commitment to open book working and steadfast safety procedures has helped them forge longstanding relationships with clients who include Network Rail and Drax Power Ltd. Notable projects include cable dehumidification work on the Humber Bridge, biomass handling facilities at Drax Power Station and the creation of a National Track Materials Recycling Centre at Whitemoor.

To track and manage documents associated with these projects, C Spencer Ltd built a powerful document management system (DMS) in-house that captures and tracks specifications, letters, contracts, emails and other

client records. The system is based on an open source LAMP software stack and runs in the Amazon AWS Cloud. It is available to all staff across multiple office locations via a web interface.

C Spencer Ltd asked Flax to add full text search based on Apache Solr to the DMS, which holds hundreds of thousands of documents and millions of emails.

"The new search engine indexes all our documents quickly and gives our users search results in less than a second", says Charles Spencer, Managing Director. "Flax's long experience and expert knowledge of enterprise search has been invaluable - they had the new system up and running in a matter of days."

"Spencer's document management system has had huge business benefits in that it allows information

sharing and management across multiple sites and parties including full open book access for clients. It has also allowed the company to make progress towards a paperless



working environment and has revolutionised the archiving process and the need for expensive storage. The retention of all information passing through the system including email traffic has resolved many problems caused by vital documents being held on personal computers or hard copies filed elsewhere and the solution Flax has collaborated on means that this retention is now matched with the power and speed to locate and report at the touch of a button."

### Search Solutions 2011 review

The British Computer Society Information Retrieval Specialist Group's annual Search Solutions conference on 16th November brought together theoreticians and practitioners to discuss the latest advances in search.

Talks included the challenges of patent search; a postcode-based browser; a social media monitoring system, all these being built on Solr. Yahoo! talked about moving beyond the 'ten blue links' model of web search, with some fascinating ideas around how we should consider a Web of objects rather than web pages; and Microsoft Research talked about how best to gather high-quality relevance judgements for testing search algorithms, using crowdsourcing systems such as Amazon's Mechanical Turk.

The day ended with a brief Fishbowl discussion which asked amongst other things what the main themes of the day had been - one was "everyone's using Solr!".

Additional talks and further details on these can be found in the review at:

<http://www.flax.co.uk/blog>

### Government backs open source

The Cabinet Office of the UK Government has released a 'procurement toolkit' to assist its own departments (and others outside government) in evaluating and selecting open source alternatives to commercial, closed source software. The Open Source Options document provided as part of the toolkit lists the search engines Apache Lucene/Solr and Xapian. We know from our own long experience how powerful and flexible these packages can be and we welcome this initiative.

[www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/open-source-procurement-toolkit](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/open-source-procurement-toolkit)

#### About Flax

Flax is highly active in the information retrieval market with international clients from sectors including academia, public relations, e-commerce, government and private businesses. Flax's clients include The Financial Times, Accenture, the Newspaper Licensing Authority, The University of Cambridge and Reed Specialist Recruitment.

Flax delivers a cutting-edge enterprise search solution, using the power of open source software to drive down costs and provide world beating search performance with no software licence fees. Flax is an authorized partner of Lucid Imagination, the commercial company behind Lucene & Solr.