

How to Differentiate Information Access Vendors and Functions

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The information access market has changed significantly during the past few years, as reflected in Gartner's 2005 Magic Quadrant. To improve the application selection process, understand what functions vendors provide and how to select products that best support your company's goals.

ANALYSIS

The information access market, which we formerly referred to as the "search" market, is more crowded than ever. This growth is occurring even as companies are buying smaller vendors that we have tracked during the past few years. We do not expect the market to become any less dynamic in 2006.

To help buyers narrow their selections, we've divided functions into two groups: basic (see "Ask for the Basic Functions When You Evaluate Information Access Engines") and extended (see "Take a Systematic Approach to Evaluating Extended Information Access Functions").

The specificity or sophistication of these functions is what differentiates them. Companies often ask how they should select a vendor to support their requirements. As basic as such a question is for all IT purchases, there are peculiarities in the information access market. Creating a request for information (RFI) is a good start (see "Use an Evaluation Process and an RFI to Select Information Access Vendors").

"Information Access" vs. "Search": We use the term "information access" to encompass a collection of technologies, including search; content classification, categorization and clustering; fact and entity extraction; taxonomy creation and management; information presentation (for example, visualization) to support analysis and understanding; and desktop (or personal knowledge) search to address user-controlled repositories to locate and invoke documents, data, e-mail and intelligence.

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