

IBM Looks to Pioneers for Information Access Support

Whit Andrews

IBM's light alliance with Google and acquisition of iPhrase underscore the company's commitment to enterprise search. But IBM's success in this area will largely depend on how well it integrates iPhrase's capabilities.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

IBM has announced two deals in information access technology for business users:

- On 28 October 2005, IBM announced a partnership to link its OmniFind information access product with Google's free desktop search engine.
- On 1 November 2005, it announced the acquisition of iPhrase, a provider of adaptive information delivery systems for e-business and e-service.

Analysis

Gartner believes that no company today can build a fully featured, leading information access platform in less than three years. IBM recognizes this and has wisely sought to provide customers with such a platform through relationships with external vendors, and now by acquiring iPhrase's pioneering technology. With both deals, IBM is essentially positioning itself to compete with Autonomy (which plans to acquire Verity), Fast Search & Transfer, and fellow giants Microsoft, Oracle and SAP.

By successfully integrating iPhrase capabilities into OmniFind, IBM's stand-alone information access technology engine, IBM could emerge as a more visionary challenger or a leader in enterprise search. When IBM launched OmniFind in 2004, this inexpensively priced product quickly gained the attention of companies that wanted better search from a reliable vendor. But OmniFind lacked some of the capabilities that many enterprises wanted, such as plain-language analysis of queries or documents and personal-knowledge search. Gartner considers iPhrase a visionary in plain language analysis and information access technology. Because iPhrase and IBM already have a technical relationship, technical integration shouldn't pose a substantial problem.

However, though integrating desktop search with enterprise search is valuable, the Google partnership is not strategic. The deal — IBM's second partnership with a personal knowledge search vendor — is similar to the company's August 2005 partnership with X1 Technologies, a provider of desktop search technologies. For now, the ability to integrate with a respected vendor's capability in that small but explosive market will provide IBM with much-needed leverage. But IBM's lack of its own desktop search facility could ultimately handicap the company, because most of the leaders in Gartner's Magic Quadrant for Information Access Technology own such a desktop facility.

Recommendations for Enterprises: Though IBM could emerge as a more visionary challenger or a leader in enterprise search through these deals, don't treat this announcement as a significant factor when selecting a personal-knowledge search or information access vendor. IBM is clearly not granting exclusive relationships, as its agreements with X1 and Google indicate.

Analytical Source: Whit Andrews, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Magic Quadrant for Information Access Technology, 2005" — The shift from a specialist focus on search technology to a broader field of information access technology capabilities has created a substantial influx of new vendors. **By Whit Andrews and Rita Knox**

- "Treat E-Mail Search-Engine Selections as KM Decisions" — A personal search product sanctioned by corporate IT departments will decrease the nonproductive time a knowledge worker expends during a typical day. **By Whit Andrews**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access the documents referenced in this First Take.)

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