

Manage Google's Desktop Search Now or Lock It Out

Whit Andrews

The newest release of Google's desktop search application is fine for technically adept personal users. But the Search Across Computers option should be disabled or heavily managed by enterprises.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 9 February 2006, Google introduced Google Desktop 3 Beta, the latest version of its desktop search application, formerly called Google Desktop Search. More information about the product is available at www.google.com.

Analysis

Google Desktop 3 Beta adds a variety of features, including the controversial Search Across Computers feature. In essence, this feature allows PCs running the application to pool certain information and documents — a convenience that brings with it a degree of risk (see "Reported Flaw Underscores Google Desktop Search Risks").

Google's decision to use a remote server to hold a temporary index is inauspicious, but unique to its strategy. Google will store an index copy of information intended to be shared on its servers for up to 30 days. Google promises that this information will be encrypted and accessible only to a small set of Google employees, who will not peruse it. Nevertheless, Gartner believes that its mere transport outside the enterprise will represent an unacceptable security risk to many enterprises. Also, workers will not always reliably identify documents that must remain outside the category of shared items. Such decisions may be based on factors such as regulatory or security restrictions.

The Search Across Computers feature may be turned off for all workers in an enterprise through the management features of Google Desktop for Enterprise, the enterprise edition of the product. Organizations using the enterprise edition should immediately disable this feature. They must also evaluate what they are allowing to be indexed, and whether they are comfortable that they can adequately bar the sharing of data with Google's servers.

Recommendations

- Enterprises that are not using Google Desktop for Enterprise but are allowing employees to use Google's desktop search application should start using the enterprise edition immediately and restrict its use accordingly.
- Enterprises that have not selected a desktop search strategy should provide a companywide default selection, including support and management, for willing workers.
- Enterprises seeking a desktop search application that have not yet selected a vendor should select one as soon as possible and move employees to the supported vendor's application.

Analytical Source: Whit Andrews, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Web Convergence Positions Google to Become the Digital Hub for a Web-Centric Knowledge Society" — Google is well on its way to becoming a digital jack-of-all-trades for a Web-centric society, diminishing the potential for startups to quickly make money from new ideas. **By Alexander Linden and Ray Valdes**
- "Google's Gmail Offers Search, but Tests Users' Trust" — Enterprises should not use free consumer-based e-mail, because it lacks enterprise-level management and security. **By Maurene Caplan Gray and 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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