



The Scottish Parliament

A pioneering application to provide public access to expenses claims by Members of the Scottish Parliament is being powered by Content Finder from Folding Space

Established in 1999, The Scottish Parliament has the legal power to pass laws on devolved subject matters in Scotland, such as education, health, law and order and environmental issues, without going through the Westminster Parliament.

Made up of 129 Members (MSP or Member of the Scottish Parliament), each person in Scotland is represented by eight MSPs; one constituency MSP and seven regional MSPs.

MSP Allowances made public

In late 2005, The Scottish Parliament decided to undertake a project to provide access to details of their use of public funds for expenses claims for scrutiny by the public via an online system accessible through The Scottish Parliament website.

The objective was to make the Parliament's expenses system into one of the most open and accountable of any parliament in the world.

The system, which went online in June 2006, utilises indexing & search technology, known as **Content Finder**, from Birmingham-based software development business, Folding Space.

The web-based service, which can be found at <http://snipurl.com/rqb2>, provides public access to the detail of allowances and expenses claimed by each MSP and operates without the need or cost for a commercial database – unlike most other search technologies.

Content Finder from Folding Space

Content Finder is a breakthrough in network software applying what is known as 'symbiotic indexing'.

This is a full text search & retrieval across networked computers approach (or through an Intranet, Extranet or Public Website) based on distributed computing and local indexing to enable very rapid and accurate retrieval of documents based upon any choice of words or phrases.

Content Finder operates without the use of a central server, repository or database, or any file re-formatting or document conversion.

Instead it works with the original folders, files, documents, programs, database records and emails.

Importantly, the technology can carry out search and retrieval simultaneously - across a network, irrespective of its size or multi-location - within every data processing device connected to that network – and to/ from any such device connected to that network.

Fast, easy search & retrieval

Users search by typing in any words, phrases, figures, and dates or similar as a search query into the Content Finder interface.

Then all the relevant folders, files, documents, programs, database records, pages, images and scans with or containing those words and/ or phrases are immediately there to access & view from the desktop.

Individual 'finds' typically take milliseconds and rarely take more than one second irrespective of how many servers, PCs and software assets are searched.

As a result, Content Finder delivers a significant advantage in terms of development time & resource cost savings and avoids the cost of a database license charge.

It also provides greater flexibility in first building and then amending and updating the system, thus avoiding expensive database programming and time consuming database planning & architecture work.

Folding Space with Iron Mountain

Folding Space worked in co-operation with Iron Mountain who, as the contractor to The Scottish Parliament, scanned the various allowances/ expenses claims forms and supporting documentation (receipts, bills, invoices, etc).





Folding Space, operating as a sub-contractor to Iron Mountain, reconciled the scans with the transactions (each claim and its associated documentation) to ensure accuracy, relevance and proper classification.

The scans and data were then consolidated into a Content Finder index for online search & retrieval.

Simultaneously, Folding Space designed and built the website application, including the search & retrieval facility, and ensured its smooth and secure running.

Public Access & Use

In practice each website visitor first nominates an MSP (or any permutation of MSPs), then chooses one or more of the ten Allowance Types and then, if desired, can choose one or more of the Expenditure Types per Allowance Type.

This can be further refined by choosing a specific claim year and month, or a date range (From, To).

The system then presents the results of the search defined by the Visitor who can also view the actual scan(s) relating to each result.

The results also provide a summary of the MSP name, the claim month, the Allowance Type, the Expenditure Type and the total amount claimed.

“This application represents an excellent example of how our indexing technology can provide the accuracy and performance that organizations are looking for, but without the associated overheads of search technologies that are based on the traditional database approach,” commented Geoffrey Smith, managing director of Folding Space.

“We’re also very pleased to be involved with such a groundbreaking project and hope that the public find the service useful and informative.”

Independent testing of the system was undertaken at the iCentrum test laboratory in Birmingham. This enabled optimisation of the system, load testing and security assessment to exceed the brief and deliver a very powerful operational environment. For example, iCentrum established that system that easily can support over 12 million hits in one hour with 3,178 hits per second (average) concurrency.

Folding Space

Folding Space software technology enables users to find, identify, discover, retrieve and manage all the folders, files, programs, documents, emails, images, scans and records across their network. Also, to create, collaborate and route files, documents, records, forms and dynamic data across the network via automated workflows and business processes.

This technology is manifested in a number of complementary software products and applications which can also be treated as software ‘modules’ or ‘aspects’ that can be assembled and customized into new products, applications and niche solutions upon demand.

Folding Space has developed an ‘intelligent software’ technology IPR that is truly unique – **sybiotic indexing** via **distributed computing** allied to a breakthrough in the concept of **intelligent, self aware documents** and **business process automation** (‘**sybiotic intelligence**’).

This world class technology and the resulting products and applications are demonstrably superior to anything comparable providing significant and sustainable competitive edge, both in terms of cost of purchase and cost of ownership.