



Information Governance within Walsall NHS

When a public sector healthcare organisation needed to establish a method of effectively responding to public requests under the Freedom of Information Act, they turned to Content Finder from Folding Space

When the Freedom of Information Act (Fol) came into force in England and Wales on January 1st, 2005, the public sector and similar organisations had new and far reaching responsibilities to answer a multitude of requests for information from members of the public across a whole range of interests.

The Act defines a legal process by which public sector information is made available to members of the public, one of the basic principles being that the burden of proof falls on the body asked for the information, not the person asking for it.

The requester does not have to give an explanation for their request, but if the information is not disclosed a valid reason has to be given.

Walsall NHS Information Governance

The Information Governance department of Walsall NHS is responsible for Freedom of Information requests and replies, together with other important functions such as data protection and confidentiality.

The department has to be in a position to quickly respond to the public on any matter whatsoever, advise them as to whether they have the information requested and whether they can have access to it.

There are some 23 exceptions within the Fol framework whereby organisations can withhold information, such as requests for personal information relating to individuals other than the person making the inquiry.

Wide ranging requests

As with any other public health organisation, Walsall NHS receives a wide variety of requests;

A typical example might be one for details of all the communications between themselves and the Health Protection Agency about a particular event of interest to the inquirer.

This breadth of interest means that the task of satisfying the information request can be immense.

Within the Walsall NHS this can run across some 20 servers for electronically held documents, and to get a precise answer being able to search across all the servers quickly is only matched in importance by the need for the search to be reliable, comprehensive and accurate.

Freedom of Information?

"Our search requirement presented a real challenge," explained Adrian Percy, information governance officer at Walsall NHS.

"We have an obligation to reply to requests within 20 working days with accuracy and clarity. This means that any search technology we employ has to balance these needs and yet be versatile enough to cope with the array of document types that an organisation such as this uses in the course of its work."

In anticipation of the expected requests for information when the Act came into force, Walsall NHS looked for a solution that could meet the search performance requirements it knew would be required.

They were looking for a balance between overall performance and the capability of the product to function across the server network without a huge technical or cost overhead.

"We expected this may present a challenge, because we didn't want to compromise between functional capabilities or be faced with a huge technical challenge to integrate the solution," said Adrian Percy.

Content Finder from Folding Space

The Information Governance department began to evaluate a solution from Birmingham-based software developer Folding Space, who specialise in software designed to seek, find and access documents, files and data.

The evaluation and subsequent installation focused on their **Content Finder** product, which works by applying what is known as 'symbiotic indexing'.





This is a full text search & retrieval across networked computers approach 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.

Instant search & retrieval

This allows the Information Governance department to enter search queries relating to the FOI requests, returning results based on document content as well as any metadata (i.e. categorization & descriptive labelling) defining the main attributes of each document (e.g. file name or size, last modified date, etc).

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.

Powerfully quick

"This is a powerful way of finding what we need, as there are many instances where we have no previous experience of documents which may relate to an inquiry, so the content element of the search is absolutely central to its success," explained Adrian Percy.

"It is also extremely quick - instantaneous in fact, which given that we are looking across 20 servers is impressive performance and allows us to refine and develop each search inquiry without the frustration of waiting for technology to keep up with us."

The Walsall NHS Freedom of Information compliance process now combines the experience and knowledge of the staff around the authority with the search and retrieval capabilities of Content Finder to ensure there are no gaps in the replies provided.

"By using Content Finder we have established a level of trust, certainty and rigorous practise with the flexibility to search independently of the knowledge and memories of our colleagues," explained Adrian Percy.

"This does a huge amount to ensure we provide a high quality service that can perform within the timescales laid down by the Act."

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.