The Four Stages of Intelligent Search

By Dr. John Lewis, EdD, Chief Knowledge Officer, SearchBlox, Inc.

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John Lewis is the author of "Story Thinking" and brings his expertise to SearchBlox, Inc. as their CKO to enhance the enterprise search journey. "Today, people need more than answers," John explains. "Often, we're also looking for understanding. Intelligent search should make it easy to discover context, explanations, and what to do next, so we can make better decisions faster."

Traditional search puts a burden on the searcher to ask the "right" question to get a helpful answer. For decades, the typical user experience has been to type, hit enter, and wade through an unwieldy list of possible matches. The search engine's job is done. If the answer isn't there, the user clicks the back button, refines their search term, and starts again.

In contrast, the modern intelligent search engine doesn't stop working after returning results. Instead, artificial intelligence (AI) tools monitor how the user interacts with the results. Then, it applies what it "learns" to the next search experience. Let's explore how AI in enterprise search helps the user make decisions before, during, and after typing and continues after the experience is complete.

1. Before Typing

With intelligent search, simply clicking the mouse into the search bar, the platform offers options to help users decide what to look for. Based on organizational goals (promotional), trending topics (popularity), or individual predictive analysis (personalization), it's possible to shape the experience before it begins. For example, the search platform could dynamically populate details about the top trending products for the day or the most relevant topics for the season to help visitors choose their path.

2. During Typing

Have you ever found yourself adjusting your search terms as you see the suggestions the search engine is offering? Without much effort on the user's part, search engines powered by AI offer assistance just as users begin to articulate the question. Again, suggestions can come from promotional, popularity, and personalization choices. For example, a physician researching medications with hard-to-spell names can count on autocomplete to make the right suggestion with just a few keystrokes.

3. After Typing

Traditional search starts and stops here, leaving the user to determine if the results are useful. However, an intelligent search platform that has optimized the first two stages can deliver a list of highly refined results. AI also makes it possible to offer specific answers quickly in other formats. For example, the tools can automatically pull an answer out of a text document and deliver it as a result. AI-enabled selection filters and sort ranking tools also dramatically narrow the list behind the scenes based on user-driven options, administration tools, and real-time analytics.

4. After Selecting

During the fourth stage, AI monitors and gathers data about how humans are interacting with the technology. Sharing the information back into the system, the search platform adjusts, creating a continuous improvement loop. With traditional search, content often exists but can't be found because the terminology or spelling doesn't match up. Intelligent search captures the contextual data surrounding a search—how questions are naturally asked, where the user came from, whether they clicked the back button—to make adjustments for the next search experience. Activity data also lets managers adjust search results manually, for example, determining the exact placement of a document ranking.

The strategy for moving search interactions upstream has huge potential. Recently, one of our customers leveraged this "DirectIntent™" approach. The results dramatically decreased the search journey, generating a 2x increase in conversions on their site in the first month after launch.

The goal of enterprise search has always been to get the best result in the shortest amount of time. As search platforms become part of your continuous improvement process, consider how all four stages of intelligent search can help end-users make better decisions faster. ∎

The Four Stages of Intelligent Search — searchblox

Before Typing	During Typing	After Typing	After Selecting
Suggested Searches	Suggested Autocomplete	Narrowing Options	Continuous Improvement
Promotional Popularity Personalization	Promotional Popularity Personalization	Specific Answers Selection Filters Sort Rankings	Automatic (AI) Insightful Reports Manual Controls
1	2	3	4

Moving user decision points upstream with continuous improvements to enhance user experience.