



Seeking a Modern Search Experience

The online user experience has – in some cases – become the only one people have with your campus. Is it as effective as it can be?



Jared Pane
Sr. Lead Solutions Architect
Elastic

FOR THE MOST PART, STUDENTS – BOTH current and prospective – don't care about data; they care about results. They want responses to their queries, whether that's accessing learning content, grades, events, the day's menu or a class opening up for registration. And they want the information immediately.

The same is true for other users on campus: faculty, researchers and staff, including IT. They're looking for fast answers to the questions they have.

Yet, too often, institutions are vested in search practices that no longer serve their needs, simply because they've been using certain search products for so long, they forget that technology moves on.

What's important with search now are three key aspects: relevant results, real-time observability and a role in securing the institution. Finding the search tool that tackles those needs will help the college better support the student experience.

Relevant Results

Enterprise search needs to enable an institution to collect all of its content in both its internal and external websites and systems – learning management systems like Blackboard, productivity tools and shared drives like Google, customer relationship management systems like Salesforce, HR documents, marketing PDFs, web pages, chats and other data sources – to make for unified search under a single user interface. Designed right, this capacity is the fastest route for helping people find what they're looking for.

Results need to be customizable, to improve search efficiency and prevent users from having to sift through thousands of possible responses when just the top ones are relevant to their individual roles, permissions, interests and intentions.

Real-Time Observability

Why shouldn't the same search power let the IT organization gain visibility into the operations of its infrastructure? The idea is to observe the entire ecosystem by peering into logs,

metrics, traces and more. That would enable the IT staffer to identify what's running well or poorly, whether server or workstation, application or website. When something goes awry, he or she would be better positioned to resolve issues more quickly and proactively, thereby ensuring better digital experiences for users.

Securing the Institution

Security information and event management (SIEM) has become a valued tool in security operation centers. The idea is to gain insights into the security state of the institution by monitoring data traffic, identifying anomalies and alerting IT for corrective action.

What's needed is a search technology outfitted with machine learning-driven detection rules for threat hunting and security analytics that are aligned to standards, such as a MITRE ATT&CK framework. Then IT can look specifically at what's happening from a security perspective: Is it a lateral movement? Is it data exfiltration? Is it related to command and control? The faster the visibility, the faster the remediation.

3 Questions to Ask

How do you know if it's time to refresh your institution's approach to search? Ask yourself:

Does your current search provider charge per "ingest" or restrict how much data can be stored? If so, the extent of what you pull in will, by necessity, be limited by budgetary considerations.

Are you hitting performance walls? Results should be generated in seconds – moments at the most. That's true whether it's a student wondering if she has passed her statistics course or an IT staffer on the hunt for a possible security breach.

Are you paying by the seat? If only a portion of people can access the search results or contribute data for ingestion due to per-seat licensing, that's going to limit the potential for a better search experience and its requisite improved decision-making across campus.

Leapfrogging Traditional Search

Elastic, named a leader in the “Forrester Wave: Cognitive Search” report, leapfrogs traditional limitations while gaining a robust presence on campuses all over the world. It places no such artificial limitations on data ingestion, data size or licensing. “Searchable snapshot,” for example, lets you store any amount of data – petabytes’ worth – for any length of time on the storage flavor of your choice, including inexpensive S3 in AWS. You no longer have to rely on high-priced SSDs or other specialized storage devices for the kind of response times your users expect or storage capacity IT needs.

Elastic binds three technologies into an integrated, well-tuned platform:

- **Elasticsearch** for query
- **Kibana** for data visualization, dashboarding and navigation
- **Elastic Agent** for data observability and limitless security detections and precision response

The Elastic Platform in Action

Elastic offers an open-source edition – free and open to anybody to use – and an open-code edition for schools that want a tighter level of control and support. The platform

can be deployed on premises or on cloud as customer requirements necessitate.

One U.S. college seeking a better search experience adopted Elasticsearch on premises because of its ease of implementation (deployment in under an hour) and customizable options (virtually putting an end to support inquiries related to hunting down what users couldn’t find online).

Another educational institution chose Elastic as the backbone of its new security center and deployed on the cloud. Shortly after implementation, the Elastic platform alerted the university of an external WordPress attack. As that school’s chief information security officer said, “I’m confident that as we add more data sources and focus on security full-time, our investment in Elastic will continue to pay even more dividends.”

The online user experience has become – in many ways – the *only* experience people may have with your institution. And that always starts with search. Make it worthwhile.

Jared Pane is the senior lead solutions architect for Elastic. Previously, Jared served as a solutions specialist for state and local government and education at Red Hat and at the California Department of Justice, as a team technical lead covering system software. He’s a self-proclaimed “lover of data.”



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