**funnelback**

CASE STUDY

# University of Edinburgh

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# In A Nutshell

The marketing team at University of Edinburgh wanted to upgrade their site search from the Google solution. Choosing Funnelback was an easy decision after they saw the capabilities to index more than just website content, drawing from all available data. Throughout the process, they discovered even more features of Funnelback to leverage across the university.

Prioritizing search helped the University meet their goals to better serve prospects, students, faculty, staff or alumni. They used the suite of analytics and auditing tools to drive an data-centered content enablement strategy, prioritizing the content that works.

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Index a multitude of separate systems

Enhance overall user experience

Improved search with enhanced features

Guide users to the right content

# The Organization

## INSPIRING THE WORLD SINCE 1583

The University of Edinburgh is one of the world's top universities, consistently ranked in the world top 50 (Times Higher Education World Rankings) and placed 18th in the 2019 QS World University Rankings. The entrepreneurial and cross-disciplinary culture attracts students and staff from across the globe, creating a unique Edinburgh experience. They provide a stimulating working, learning and teaching environment with access to excellent facilities. We attract the world's best, from Nobel Prize winning laureates to future explorers, pioneers and inventors.

As host to more than 40,000 students from some 156 countries, the University of Edinburgh continues to attract the world's greatest minds. They offer a range of ways to study, from on-campus taught programmes to online part-time study. They are the largest provider of online distance learning in the Russell Group of UK research-intensive universities, and offer more than 70 online programmes. The flexible and supportive online learning programmes are an increasingly popular choice for students looking to balance further study with professional or family commitments.

## TEACHING AND RESEARCH EXCELLENCE

The latest report from the Quality Assurance Agency awarded the university the highest rating possible for the quality of the student learning experience. They offer around 500 undergraduate programmes and more than 300 taught masters programmes and 180 research areas from across our three Colleges: College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science, College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, College of Science and Engineering

University of Edinburgh's position as one of Britain's leading research universities was reaffirmed by the results of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF). The REF rates 83% of the research activity as world-leading or internationally excellent,ranking us 4th in the UK based on the quality and breadth of research. They are associated with 21 Nobel Prize winners, and the dynamic research culture has led to the discovery of chloroform anaesthesia, the Higgs boson particle and in-vitro fertilisation. They have produced innovations such as Dolly the sheep – the first mammal to be genetically cloned from an adult somatic cell, as well as the first genetically engineered hepatitis B vaccine, and technology used in smartphones. The academics have advanced the public understanding of how our behaviour affects aging, helped protect forest ecosystems, and helped bring broadband to remote communities.

# The Organization (cont.)

Joining the University as a student provides you with a unique opportunity to work with some of the most influential academics in your chosen field. At Edinburgh, you will develop your specialist skills, deepen your understanding and gain new insights and perspectives to equip you for your career ahead.

Funnelback spoke to Stratos Filalithis, the Head of Website & Communication Technologies. The team is part of the University's Information Services Group, one of three such professional services groups established to support the function, strategy, and delivery of excellence in teaching and research at the University of Edinburgh. The team is responsible for managing and developing web services, including the nearly 50,000-page University website.

**INDUSTRY**

Higher Education

**COUNTRY**

United States

**WEBSITE**

www.ed.ac.uk

**FEATURES**

Drupal integration

SEO auditor

Search analytics

Data driven insights

# Key Project Objectives

The Website & Communication Technologies team had a strong vision for search. "It needed to follow an enterprise search-type approach," said Stratos Filalithis, who spearheaded the project. "The end goal is to have a search that's easy to access, helps audiences to complete their task as quickly as possible, and catalogs all the useful and related data content that is at the University." The search would be much wider than website content alone, and tap into all available data. Search, in the end, would present people with an excellent solution to achieve their objectives as prospects, students, faculty, staff or alumni.

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The University had utilised paid Google site search solutions for a number of years. Looking for more than a like-for-like replacement, they issued a procurement exercise to identify a superior solution that could connect to multiple sources and fulfil the search vision set forth in the objectives.

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# The Requirements

## OVER ONE MILLION PIECES OF CONTENT ACROSS MULTIPLE PROPERTIES

Funnelback had the knowledge and experience, especially in the higher education arena, to fulfil the objectives of the search team. And Funnelback could achieve their vision across multiple properties. "We estimate that we have nearly one million pieces of content just across all our subdomains, not counting other data needed to achieve our vision," commented Filalithis. The whole University presence encompasses roughly 1,500 websites, including the EdWeb CMS built atop Drupal that forms the basis of their core sites, and many have differing content standards, underlying systems, and metadata quality.

## AN ENTERPRISE APPROACH

To achieve the objectives of the team, other services were integrated into Funnelback: staff and contact databases, course directories, research information (access to the PURE database was critical) and more.

Though many services weren't designed with enterprise access in mind, "we haven't deviated from the vision at all," Filalithis notes. "When we first implemented Funnelback, the priority was to replace what we had. But since then, we've looked at things we didn't have before." The University has integrated degrees and programs, blogs, contact databases, and created facets and tabs to distinguish between formats. And they haven't stopped exploring new ideas as the value of effective Funnelback search has been realised again and again.

## SEARCH ACROSS ANYTHING

"People now ask how they could use Funnelback to search across other services," Filalithis says with pride. For example, he's recently answered questions about replacing Microsoft SharePoint's built-in search with Funnelback.

# The Solution

Squiz Scotland, a Funnelback partner, worked closely with the University of Edinburgh to achieve their objectives. Heavy Drupal users, the University relies on the power of Funnelback to unite their data effectively.
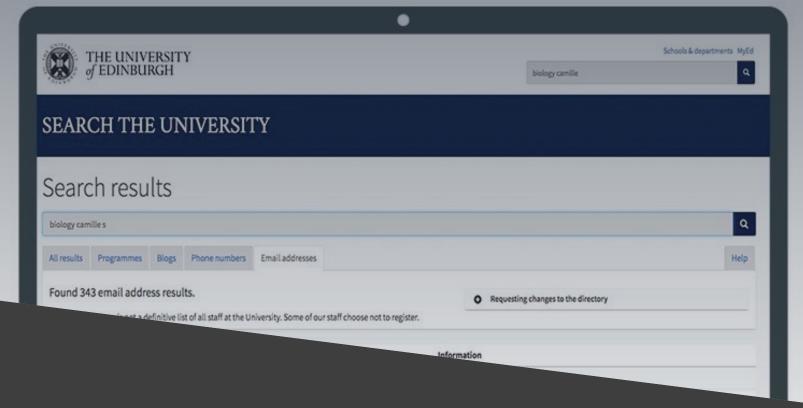
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The University introduced search auditing techniques to ensure quality across their new tool. On a roughly monthly basis, the team picks the three to five hundred top terms from their Funnelback search analytics. They look at the top five search results for each term, assessing whether the most desirable result is appearing near the top, then create a report that indicates, for top terms, how search is performing.

Based on these reports, a number of changes have been made to fine-tune the search system. Utilising the analytics and insights from Funnelback, including SEO auditor, the University removed all but the highest-priority sites from the index, surfacing only content from the homepage. "This creates a much better experience for the user, and we couldn't have done anything like this without the reporting capabilities of Funnelback," Filalithis notes. "That wasn't available in any other platform. With Google it wasn't even a possibility. That extra insight from Funnelback is extremely, extremely critical."

# The Result

The University's Funnelback search instance just "keeps getting better," Filalithis says. The solution, launched in 2018, has slowly enabled additional Funnelback features so the solution doesn't disrupt existing search patterns. Filalithis' team closely monitors search performance, a KPI for their search solution. A long-term success factor is the additional capabilities provided by integrating with other services.

Some of the credit for a successful implementation goes to a multi-year effort to adhere to structured content tagging from schema.org. "When the time was ripe for better search, we were able to just index this data and it just worked. During a Funnelback demo early on, Funnelback had already picked up a lot of the metadata structure and was already showing what we wanted to see," reports Filalithis. This made implementation of Funnelback capabilities like autocomplete even easier.

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