Background

Microsoft acquired FAST Search in 2008, and moved rapidly to include the FAST search engine into the SharePoint platform. In 2010, Ceonex was asked to help create a demonstration of FAST Search for SharePoint 2010 that would effectively display its potential to deliver substantial returns on investment by improving targeted information discovery within the enterprise.

Jeff Fried, Microsoft's Product Manager for the FAST Search for SharePoint 2010 product, initially asked Ceonex to help create several search application demo designs focusing on different business applications. Ceonex's involvement ranged from concept to wire framing to creating Photoshop designs for use in Microsoft's sales presentations. From there, the next step was to actually produce a working search application demo in SharePoint 2010, using one of the design concepts as a jumping-off point.

The Challenge

The challenge was to create a set of demonstration "search applications" that illustrate how FAST Search for SharePoint can power business specific applications that go well beyond traditional search. The demos had to be:

- Clear - "I understand it": what it does, how & who it helps
- Compelling - "WOW! I want it": visually appealing, clear value proposition
- Connected – "I need FAST": reinforces key features and differentiators
- Credible – "I can implement and use it": deliverable technically with reasonable
- Concise - "I got it quickly and can tell others"

In order to produce a realistic search experience, even within a defined set of search topics, a reasonable number of fictitious documents also had to be produced.

Solution

Ceonex helped develop 6 different search application concepts, and went on to implement a working demonstration of one of these. We developed user interface illustrations for all 6 applications that were used to develop a slide deck. One search application was then chosen for actual implementation as a demonstration.

The chosen business application was a knowledgebase for a fictitious consulting company. As the business needs of a consulting firm are not as specialized as some industries, the demo would be more applicable to a variety of vertical markets.

The demo would tell a story that many businesses can relate to. A sales manager and a strategy consultant both interact with the knowledgebase to quickly gain needed information to prepare for a meeting with a prospect - with heavy time pressure. Despite their different roles and needs, they are both able to mine the knowledgebase for valuable items with a minimum of effort and no specialized search skills. Built-in tools are available to help them in their tasks. Ceonex was responsible for creating

a demo that told this story in a way that excited prospects and helped them to easily grasp the potential for the application meeting their own needs.

Building the demonstration project involved the following:

- Fully specifying and designing the user interface
- Implementing the graphical user interface
- Creating a set of over 800 suitable documents to serve as the search collection
- Creating interactive "visual refiners" that allow users to rapidly assess the distribution of documents over various metadata categories and drill down into results
- Incorporating and further customizing the enhanced search refiner web part. Enhancements include visual refiners, "collapsing" refiners, and fixed taxonomy refiners with multi-select
- Incorporate a Bing Maps search refinement web part that allows visually refining a search geographically
- Incorporating a "work area" web part where users can accumulate documents, saved searches, PowerPoint slides, and other search results items. These items can be accumulated from as many individual searches as desired, and can be saved to a permanent site such as "MySite".
- Configuring FAST Search for SharePoint to work with the document collection and web parts to "tell the story".
- Packaging the demo so that it can be installed on any suitably configured server. This involved creating solution files for the web parts and graphical element "features", installing the document collection, and configuring search. All tasks are accomplished through the use of PowerShell scripts that require no manual intervention once the install is initiated. The demo can be installed on a virtual machine with as little as 6 GB of RAM.

The Results

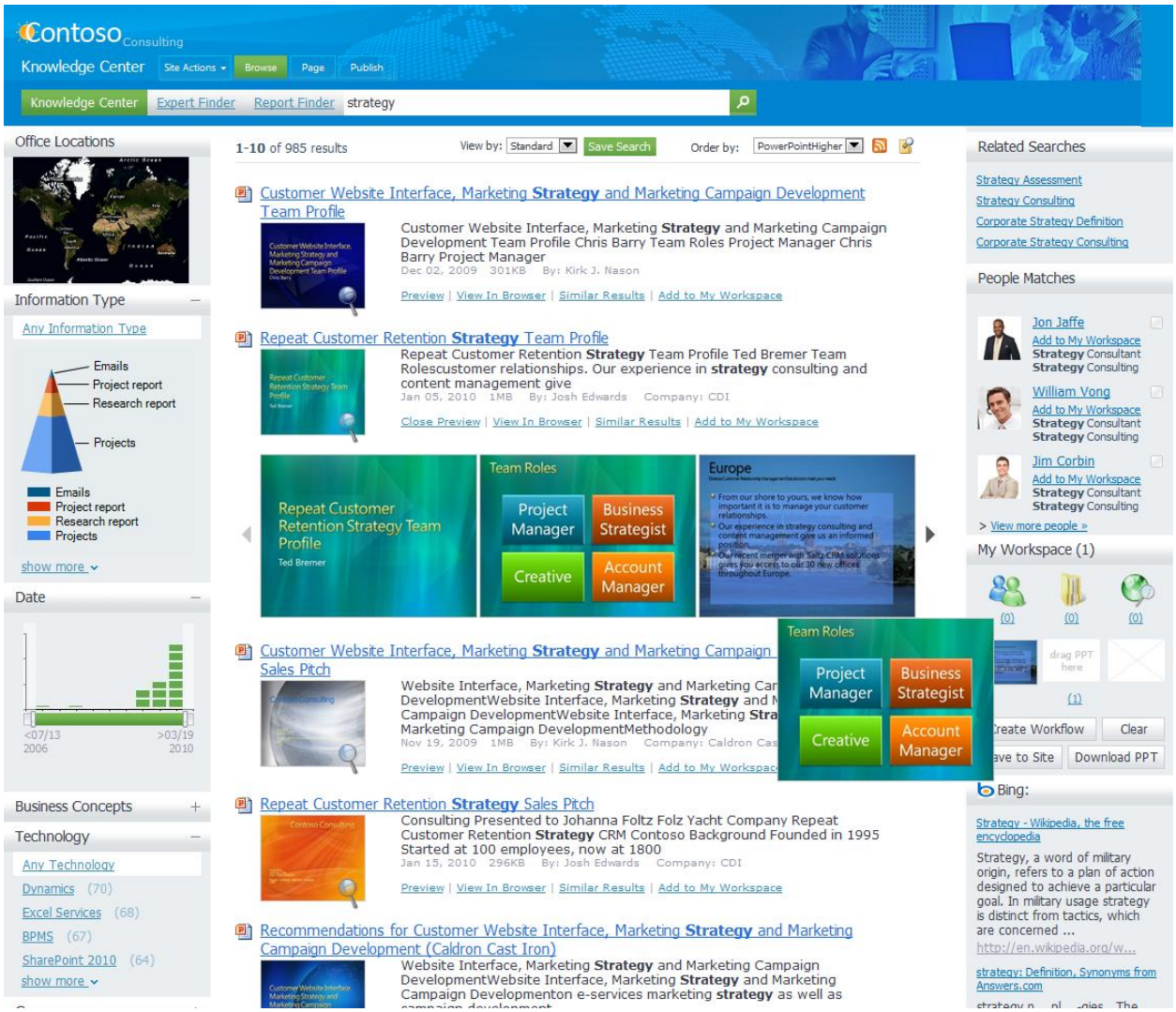
The demo has been very well received within Microsoft by the sales community and is available on Microsoft's demo site as both an online and downloadable demo. Customers have regularly asked for access to the customized web parts and details on implementation.

We are developing documentation and sample code for release within the next month. Interested parties may request access to the demo or a walk through by contacting info@ceonex.com.

Screen Prints and References

A companion PowerPoint illustrates the above features. A screen print of the search results page is appended.

References furnished on request.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Dynamics (70)
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