Product Review of Northern Light SinglePoint

In-depth, independent review of the product, plus links to related resources

"...clients have reported quantifiable savings in several areas which provide good metrics which can be useful when the time comes to present the financial case for implementing a strategic research portal..."

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Introduction; Key Advantages; Contact Details

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View author biography

Northern Light has been providing strategic research portals, business research content, and search technology to global enterprises since 1996. Their SinglePoint strategic research portal provides a single point of access for all of a client's internal and external research and is fully customisable. It integrates a company's internal market research with licensed secondary research via a single, securely hosted solution. Northern Light handles all aspects of configuration, deployment, content aggregation, indexing and search, text analytics, collaboration, user management, document security and reporting.

Northern Light applies powerful text analytics to the full text of documents, using its search technology which is optimised for business research.

Jinfo last reviewed SinglePoint in November 2013.

Audience

SinglePoint's main users include market and competitive intelligence staff, market research departments, sales teams, product, marketing and purchasing managers, product developers, technology researchers, IT practitioners and executive business leaders, predominantly from large organisations.

Northern Light currently has over 35 clients which include Fortune 100 market leaders in information technology, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, energy, financial services, transportation, retailing, and consumer products.

Most of their clients reside in Europe or the US but it's difficult to pinpoint exactly where all their clients are because responsibility for the portal may be split between two different countries with so many companies now operating globally.

Changes since last reviewed in 2013:

- Integrated market research workflow solution (Primary Research Manager)
- Integrated newsletter tool
- Updated look and feel, now uses more current controls icons and organisation
- Lighter weight, nicer appearance
- More tablet-friendly through vertical organisation of menus instead of horizontal layers, tappable or clickable controls instead of drop down action menus
- Better strategic dashboard navigation (dashboard directory, recent and favourite dashboards) for users
- Better management and authoring of dashboards
- Integrated mobile apps that can access the content and user account (for saved searches, expert searches) of the corresponding SinglePoint portal
- Real-time reporting for portal and content usage
- Concept-based search summaries that show the selected concepts when a user takes advantage of the text analytics (MI Analyst).

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Key Advantages

Very few companies can aggregate web news, secondary research, social media, and a client's own internal market research content and Northern Light is unique in being able to operate on both sides of the firewall to harvest this content. The SinglePoint portal claims to have a high ROI and, the vendor says, pays for itself "ten to twenty times per year".

SinglePoint clients have reported quantifiable savings in several areas which provide good metrics which can be useful when the time comes to present the financial case for implementing a strategic research portal. Some of which include:

- **Time saved:** SinglePoint clients save a lot of time as they don't need to search multiple market research analyst firm websites or execute generalised web searches. With a suggested metric of $100 x 1.5 hours, a typical Northern Light client experiences 18,000 user sessions per year on the portal resulting in saving of staff time valued at $2.7 million per year
- **Consolidated purchasing of information:** SinglePoint consolidates access and enterprise-wide sharing of licensed content, resulting in cost savings for the organisation. A typical SinglePoint client has 15 sources and 6,000 user accounts and would experience a saving of $900,000 per year in avoided duplicate report purchases
- **Reduced number of websites/portals:** Departments within organisations often create and manage many internal websites, each for a different audience such as sales or marketing, in multiple organisations and geographies and SinglePoint reduces this need
- **Supporting a larger number of users with fewer staff:** In times of budget cuts and staff reductions, SinglePoint can support a wide number of users with a very limited internal staff
- **Obtaining new business:** Most of Northern Light's clients use SinglePoint portals to help them prepare for sales presentations, customer briefings, or to find persuasive analyst support for their products to make them more compelling to potential customers
- **Intellectual property issues and fair use:** Users can unwittingly violate the usage terms of their agreements with sources of secondary research which can result in large invoices. SinglePoint enforces the terms of the content licensed so organisations don't have to worry
- **Improved decision making:** Critical strategic research projects need well informed and high-quality information. With SinglePoint, users have the best information available on every search easily and quickly
- **Developing new products faster:** By having easy access to all licensing and primary research, researchers can spend less time looking for information and more time considering it.

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Sources - Content & Coverage

SinglePoint portals involve subscription-based published research from research analysts and Northern Light has agreements with some of the world's leading technology and industry research content providers. They currently integrate over 160 premium sources and add new sources regularly.Clients can add providers that aren't listed and Northern Light has a good reputation for being flexible when it comes to working with providers, allowing them to determine how they want to do the technical integration.

Table 1 contains a list of current content partners:

Aberdeen Group	Informa Telecoms
ABI Research	InfoTech Trends
AMI-Partners	InfoTrends
Analysys Mason	INPUT
Arab Advisors	Kable Direct
ARC Advisory Group	Leichtman Research Group
Atlantic ACM	Light Reading
Canalys	McKinsey & Company
Celent Communications	Medline
Centurion Research Solutions	Mintel Oxygen
ClinicalTrials.gov	Multimedia Research Group - MRG
Compass Intelligence	NelsonHall
Conference Abstracts	Northern Light Primary Documents
Conference Board	Northern Light Wiki
Cook Network Consultants	NPRG
Corporate Executive Board	Ovum
Current Analysis	Parks Associates
Customer Insights	PartnerPath
Datamonitor	Patricia Seybold Group
Decision Resources	Photofinishing News
Directions on Microsoft	Pierre Audoin Consultants
Drugs @FDA	Pike & Fischer
Eagle Eye	Program Management SharePoint Site
EBSCO Biomedical Corporate	PubMed Central (PMC)
EIU	Pyramid Research
Enterprise Strategy Group (ESG)	SalesQuest
Everest Group	Saugatuck Technology
External Research	Sirius Decisions
Faulkner Information Services	Sky Light Research
FBO	STAT!Ref
Forrester Research	Strategy Analytics
Freedonia	Synergy Research
Frost & Sullivan	TBRI
Heavy Reading/Light Reading	TeleGeography Research
IDC	The 451 Group

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Ideas International	TheInfoPro
IEC	Tower Group
Info-Tech Research	US Patent Application Database
InfoBase Publishers	Yankee Group
Infonetics Research	*And others*

The research firms simultaneously publish content to their own repositories as well as Northern Light's who then index the full text for their clients. They index every word on every page and apply sophisticated text analytics throughout the document and this is where they differ.

The client can also include their own internal research within the portal and there are multiple ways that Northern Light can integrate it. This can be achieved using a Microsoft SharePoint connector that will export their SharePoint content to the SinglePoint portal. There's also an upload system that comes with the portal whereby clients can add documents directly to it or clients can use FTP transfers from other types of repositories.

The portals can be deployed within 90 days and a typical SinglePoint research portal will contain between 5 and 40 licensed external research sources, an internal primary research repository, Northern Light Business News as well as licensed news feed and custom harvesting of content from government databases and the web and will be used by approximately 5,000 users within a company.

Table 2 shows some of the content that can be included within a SinglePoint research portal:

Source	More Information
Secondary research reports	From leading market and technology research vendors
The client's proprietary research	For example, content created by market intelligence or competitive intelligence staff
Northern Light business news	Features around 40,000 news articles daily from 6,500 business-focused news. It also includes business wires, trade journal and association sites, and industry authority bloggers. The strength of the collection is its focus on industry news sites because those are where the journalists with industry expertise are, and who provide original high quality journalism with analysis, commentary, and perspective on the subject industry. Any other news, periodical, or journal collections that a client licenses can be included too. Northern Light maintains an 18-month archive of 15 million articles in total. The service also features MI Analyst text analytics applied to all the news articles in the collection
Industry authority blogs	2,000 daily blog posts from 3,000 industry blogs from authoritative sources such as an industry research analyst, a journalist for a recognised trade publication, or an industry executive
White papers	44,000 white papers from 800 leading information technology companies including IBM, Oracle, Cisco, Microsoft and Dell and hundreds more

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Source	More Information
Social media	Northern Light harvests posts from larger social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs, and YouTube
Life sciences conference proceedings abstracts	Northern Light aggregates and indexes thousands of abstracts, posters and proceedings from life sciences conferences
Government databases	Such as Medline, clinical trials, patents, or federal purchasing opportunities
Custom web search	Northern Light can crawl any part of the web and include a searchable index of that material. This could include industry trade sites or competitors' websites.

Languages

The following 18 languages are covered:

- Chinese
- Danish
- Dutch
- English
- Finnish
- French
- German
- Hungarian
- Italian
- Japanese
- Korean
- Norwegian
- Portuguese
- Russian
- Romanian
- Spanish
- Swedish
- Turkish.

Jinfo's View: Sources

✓ *Seamlessly integrates a client's internal and external research*	✓ *Time saved by avoiding duplication of subscriptions and everything is centralised*
✓ *No need for a large investment to replicate SinglePoint's capabilities and the financial liability that may be incurred from hosting third party content on an enterprise network*	✗ *The portal is geared towards larger organisations so the cost may be prohibitive to smaller firms.*

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Technology - Search & User Interface; Outputs & Alerts; Administration

Technology

SinglePoint is a cloud-based product and supported browsers include Microsoft Internet Explorer 9.0 and higher, Chrome, Opera 8 and higher, Safari and Mozilla Firefox, which was used for this review.

SinglePoint has updated its look and feel since the last review in 2013, using more current controls, icons and organisation. It now has a lighter weight and nicer appearance.

There are still several tabs across the top of the screen which can be customised for a company or department. Each client can set their own tabs based on their use case (e.g. market research, competitive intelligence, technology research, etc.) along with their content choices. Most users choose to keep their tabs closely aligned with the suggested "Best Practices" user interface because they know they work.

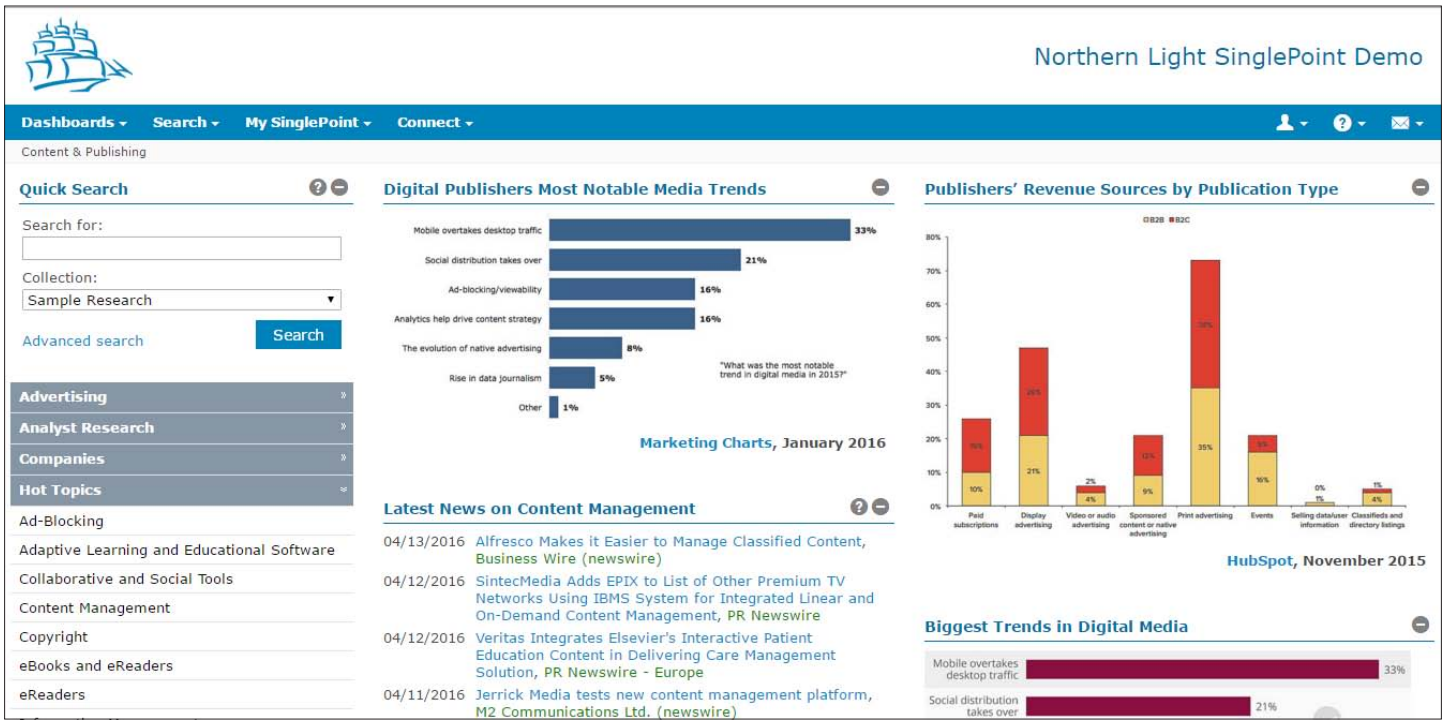

Figure 1: Homepage

The trial version consisted of four tabs, Dashboards, Search, My SinglePoint and Connect (see Figure 1) the features of which are outlined below. Because SinglePoint is designed to deliver more focused content than other business research platforms, Jinfo chose "technology" as its subject to test the portal's functionality and provide more pertinent content.

Dashboards

The dashboard offers a real-time user interface and is created by the portal administrator to ensure the content will be of interest to their users. The dashboard displays a Quick Search widget to retrieve SinglePoint content by keyword, as well as Headline widgets for timely and relevant content from selected sources. There is also

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an Accordian widget with drop-down menus, consisting of expert searches on topics of interest to a business. As well as being able to open and close widgets, users can move them to different locations on the page. The portal administrator can also create additional widgets.

As mentioned, SinglePoint is designed to meet the research needs of self-supporting business professionals and information centres that support them. It delivers more focused content than other business research platforms and offers a way to access a company's licensed content using one login and search which results in one integrated list, classified and relevance-ranked to a single consistent standard. An organisation's internal market research can also be indexed and searched. Additional dashboards can be created for specific work groups, departments or even geographical regions. More topics can be added if necessary.

Clients can have as many dashboards as they want. These dashboards provide a place for an expert, such as a market intelligence professional, to present an organised view of a topic to a user group of more casual users, such as sales people, product managers and executive business leaders who make up around 80% of SinglePoint's users. Although geared towards the more casual user, the strategic dashboards still offer plenty of options for the more experienced searcher, such as those in market or competitive intelligence, as shown later in this review.

Each topic features the latest news and reports as well as a useful graphic to the right of the screen for users who just want a quick visual overview. The client can set up as many categories and topics as they want.

The news headlines use a very space efficient layout showing just the date, title and citation information. When you hover over any of the stories you get a pop up box that gives you a summary of the story with enough information to decide whether you want to click on the link and read further.

If you choose to retrieve an article a new window opens taking you to the article on the website it came from, assuming you have access rights. This will be clear before you click on the link as there will be a locked or unlocked icon to the right of the article. If it's locked then access can be requested from the department that has access. A "no entry icon" indicates that the report is not available to the user's organisation but a summary is still available. Northern Light uses rigorous security measures to ensure that a client's documents remain confidential and only those with authorisation rights can access a document.

Alternatively, you can run a search using your chosen keywords in the *Quick Search* box and choose a collection from the drop down box underneath. The choices were *IT News or IT Social Media*.

Or to the left of the screen you can *Analyze Your Search* (more on this below). These results are powered by Northern Light's search engine, *MI Analyst,* which is designed specifically for business research. The MI Analyst identifies business and research issues contained in the documents on the search results which allows the user to quickly analyse research content and find patterns and relationships that imply meaning.

My SinglePoint

This is a personalised dashboard (see Figure 2) that can be customised for a user's specific research needs, with widgets and content selected by and for each user. You can drag and drop the widgets here too. The "My SinglePoint" tab is a drop down arrow that's divided into the following headings: *My Headlines, My Saved Searches, My Bookmarks* and *Bookmarked for Me*.

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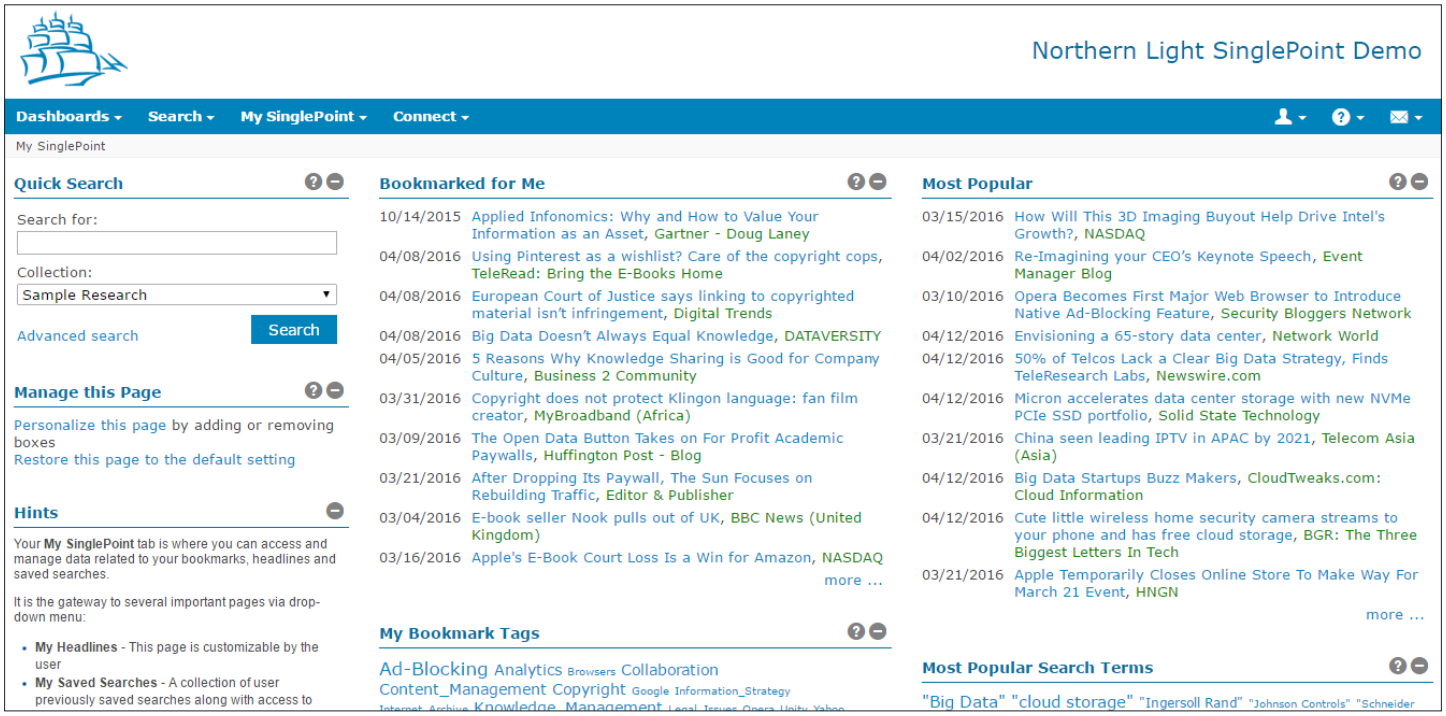


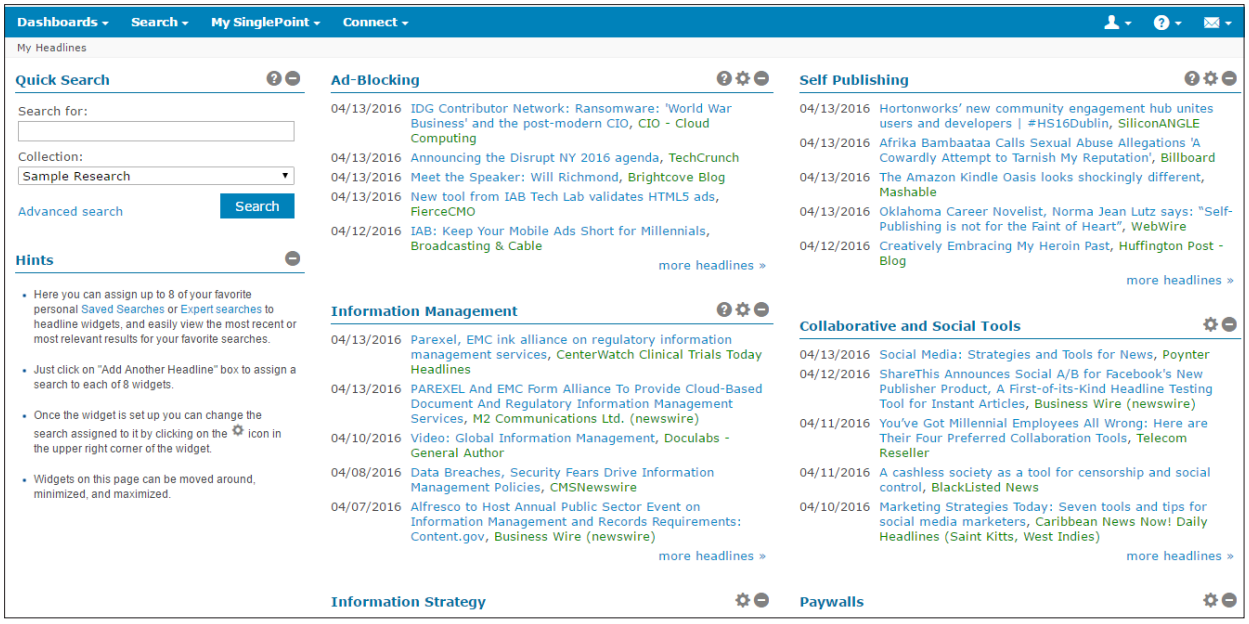
Figure 2: My SinglePoint

- **My Headlines:** this is where you can assign your favourite personal or expert searches to headline boxes.

The user can assign up to eight of their favourite personal saved searches or expert searches to headline widgets allowing them to easily see the most recent or relevant results for their favourite searches. By clicking on the Add Another Headline link at the bottom of the page the user can assign a search to each of eight widgets. Once the widget is set up you can change the search assigned to it by clicking on the small gearwheel icon in the upper right corner of the widget. Widgets can be moved around, minimised and maximised.

- **My Bookmarks:** This contains a collection of a user's favourites (see Figure 3). Bookmarks can be used to keep links to a user's favourite articles, blogs, reports and documents, or to share your favourites with colleagues or explore your colleagues' bookmarks to discover new things.

Figure 3: My Bookmarks



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There is a search box to the left of the screen. You can assign as many tags to a bookmark as you like. You can tag and save documents by clicking on the star icon from the results list or by clicking the *Share this Document* button on the *Full Summary* page.

A box will pop up where you can enter notes and tags about the document and share it with members of your network. You can also mark bookmarks as private.

- **Bookmarked for Me:** This contains all the links saved for you by other people and is designed to encourage the sharing of expertise within an organisation.

Search and User Interface

The Sample Search (see Figure 4) link allows you to carry out a more advanced search. Northern Light supports full Boolean capability including parenthetical expressions and there is no limit to the level of nesting which you can use in a search query. It also supports two truncation symbols in queries. The * (**asterisk**) can be used to replace multiple characters. The **%** (**percent**) symbol is used to replace only one character. You can use the proximity operators **NEAR** and **WITHIN** to find documents that contain terms that are no more than a defined number of words away from each other.

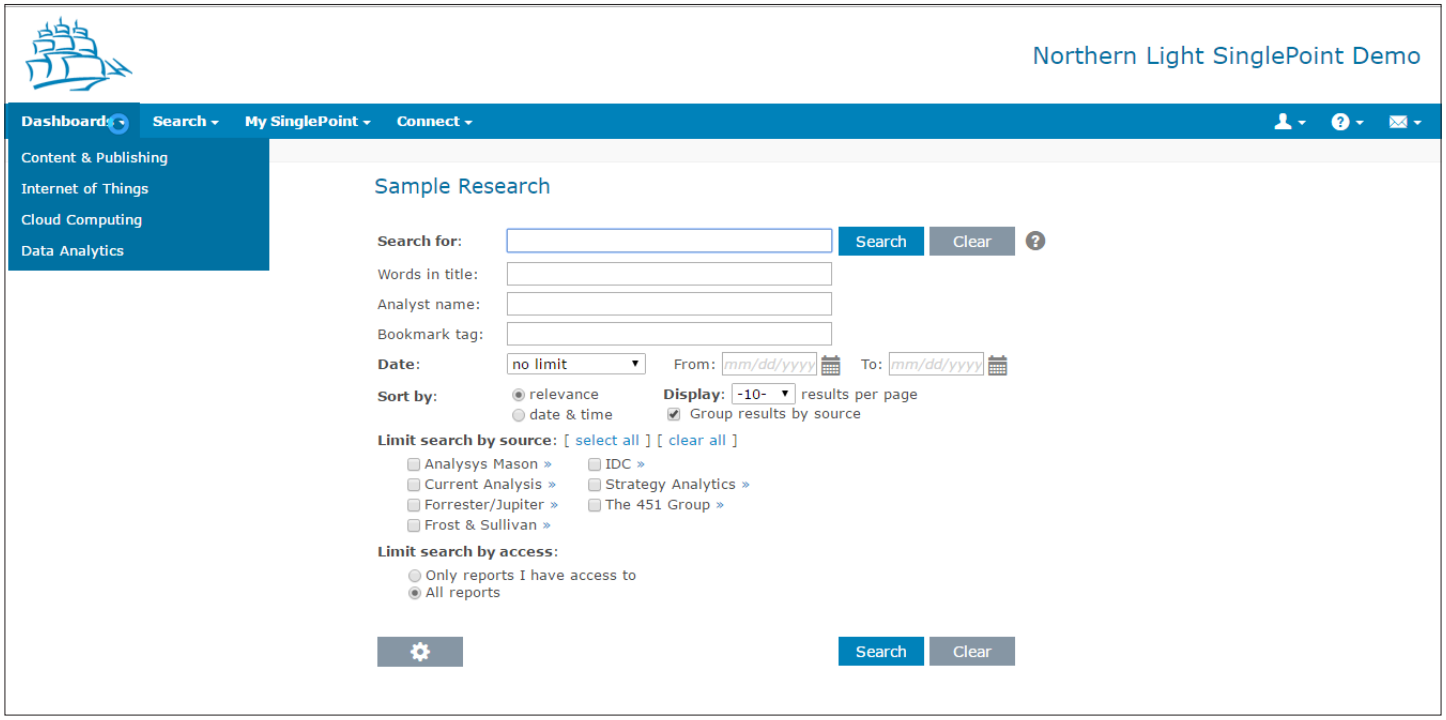

Figure 4: Sample Search

You can select a date range and sort results by relevance or date. You can also change the number of results per page to 10, 20, 30, 50 or 100 and limit the search by source. A user also has the option to change the default values for the search.

Expert Searches are a library of searches created by experts such as the market intelligence staff or Northern Light's team of online researchers. Because they are created by experts and intended to be reused many times, they can be very elaborate and often exploit Northern Light's rich search options extensively. Expert Searches can be subscribed to by users as Search Alerts, or can be used in Headline Boxes or Strategic Dashboards or placed on personal dashboards such as My Headlines and can also be used to power Microsoft Web Parts for distribution on a company's intranet.

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Analyze Your Search: (see Figure 5) shows the Analyze Your Search boxes on the left side of your search results page.

This is powered by Northern Light's MI Analyst technology and provides you with a way of refining your search, and paring down your results without editing your search query. It allows you to discover relationships between the concept areas revealed in your search results, which mitigates research barriers such as unfamiliar or unidentified concepts, symbols, acronyms and aliases. Using this will help you uncover relevant business issues hidden in content, identify threats and opportunities regarding products, market share, pricing, new technologies, marketing partnerships, and business strategy. You can also perform trend analysis with display and data export options.

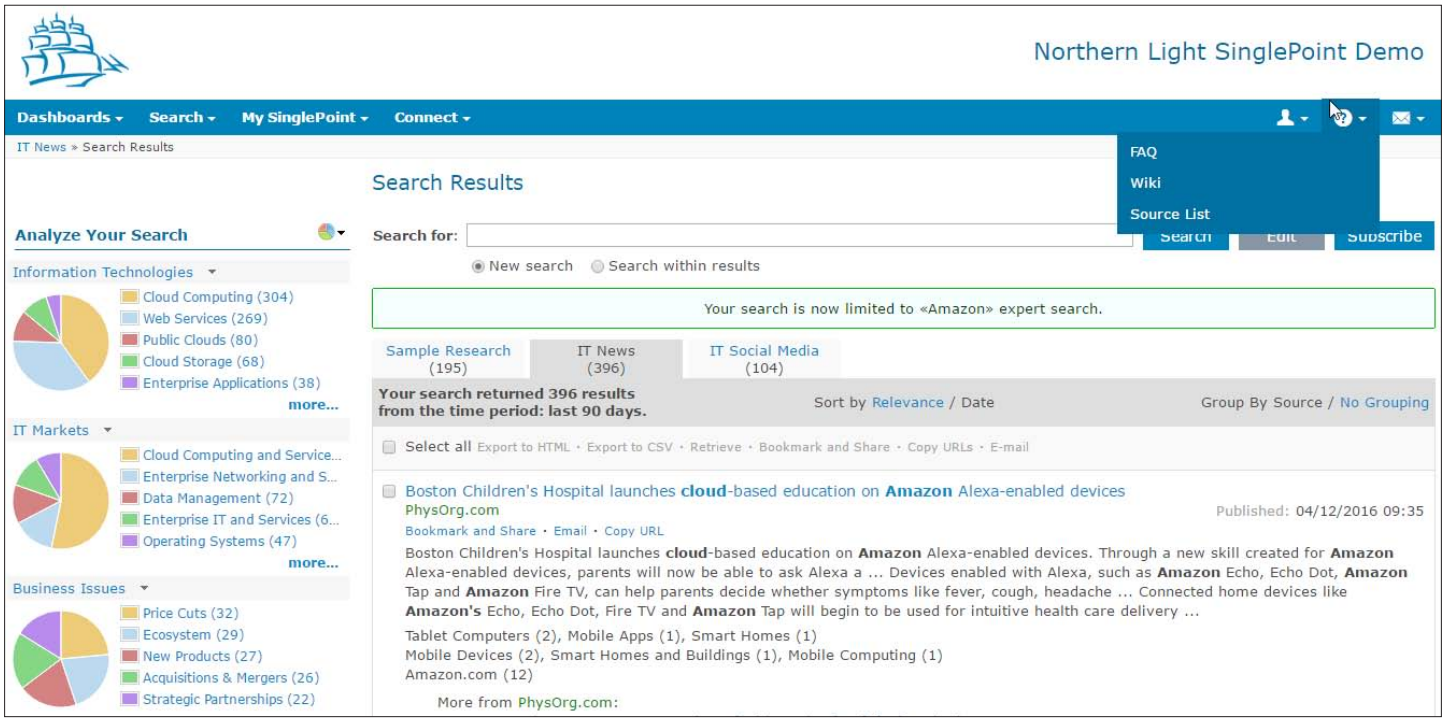

Figure 5: Analyze Your Search

Individual concepts are extracted from your search results documents and organised into concept areas, such as:

Business Issues, Companies, Venture Funded Companies, Analysts, Analyst Firms, Corporate Finance, Global Markets, Global Risk Factors, IT Technologies, IT Markets, Sources, Legal & Regulatory, Job Titles, Strategic Scenarios and Trends.

Analysed results can be viewed in three formats: as pie charts, bar charts or list format.

By clicking on the "more" link you can see more listings and sort the results alphabetically.

Languages

There are 18 languages available on SinglePoint including Chinese, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish.

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Output

If you need ongoing information on a topic you can save it as an Alert. You'll get an email on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. You just click the Save button on the right hand side of the search results page (see Figure 6). Your search will show up in My Saved Searches where you can View, Edit or Delete them. The search alerts will update at the frequency you selected and an email will be sent to you. At the bottom of the page you can preview the results of your search and apply limiting criteria to that search, such as Words in the title, Publication name, Language, Date, Vendor, Interest Area, etc.

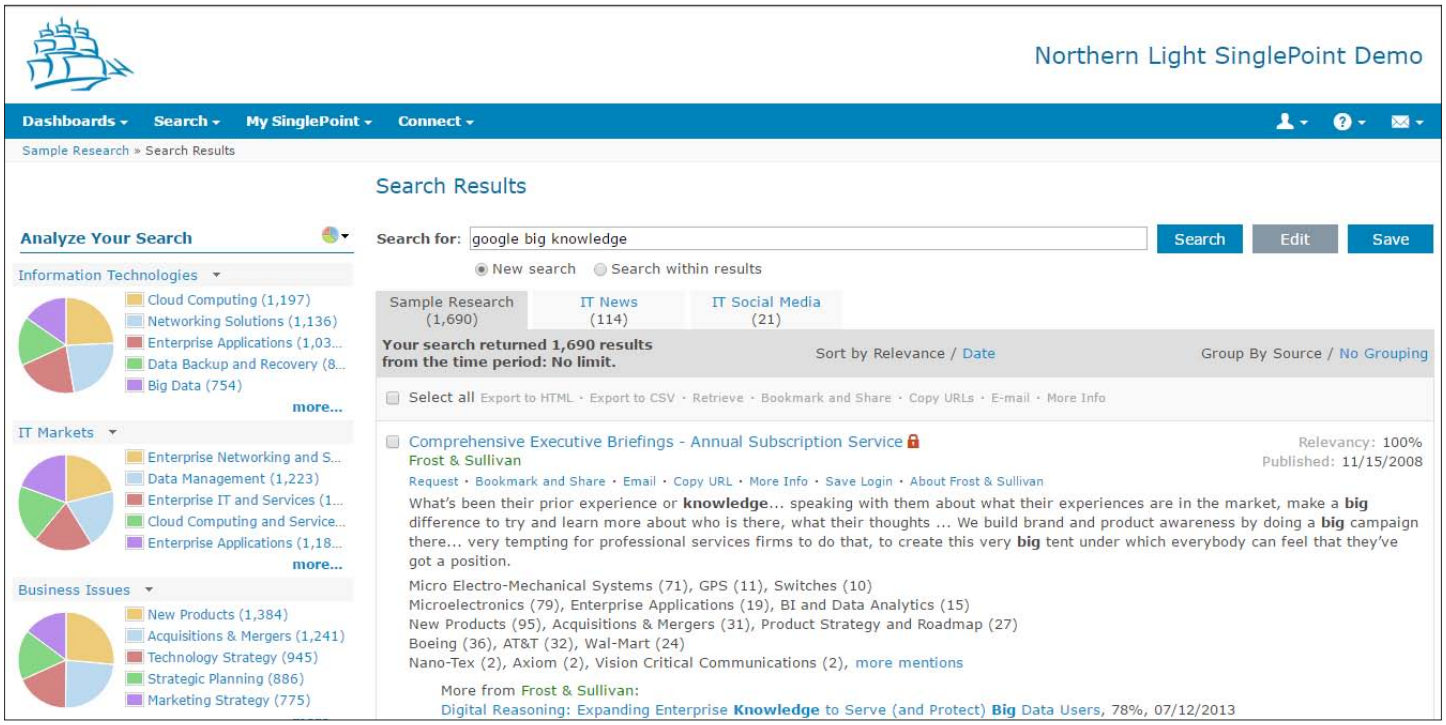

Figure 6: Save Alerts

Beneath the title and source of each record in your search results you'll see a series of Action links:

- *Request*: sends a request to the portal administrator for access to a document outside of the collection
- *Bookmark and Share*: Allows you to Bookmark the page for easy future retrieval and sharing with colleagues
- *Email*: opens a pop-up window so you can write a message to the recipient
- *Copy URL*: copies the URL of the requested document for pasting in an email or other document
- *More Info*: this offers a document summary
- *Save Login*: allows you to enter and save personal login info to access certain content sources
- *About*: provides contact info for content source, as well as a link to all content from that source.

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If you select multiple documents at one time you can:

- Export to HTML
- Export to CSV
- Retrieve
- Bookmark and Share
- Copy URLs
- Email
- More Info: this takes you to the document's details pages.

Connect

SinglePoint encourages collaboration and this is where users can create and manage groups and share research content with colleagues or other groups to enable them to benefit from the experience of the whole group or other people's expertise. My Groups are listed on the left and clicking on the relevant group takes you to the *Groups* page (see Figure 7) which would list *Group Bookmarks* and *Headlines*. There would also be a tag cloud on the left (not available on the trial version) which allows users to see what other users are searching on and saving. Under this are various *Group Options* where a user can view members, discussions, bookmarks, change the layout of the page and subscribe or unsubscribe from discussions and bookmarks. One advantage of allowing collaboration within the SinglePoint research portal is that document access rights can still be enforced so only those with specific access rights get to see the right documents. Another advantage is that users can see which documents and reports are read the most and by whom.

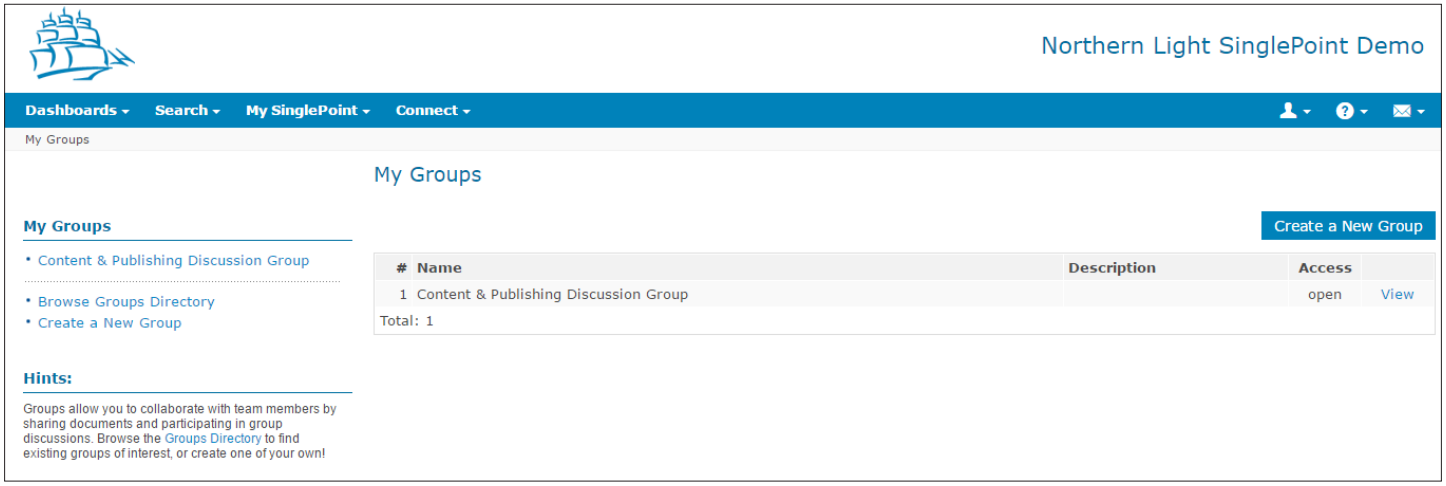

Figure 7: My Groups

Mobile App

Northern Light now offers a free app featuring industry-optimised business news feeds aggregated from 30,000 business and technology stories a day from 5,700 web business and technology news sources, including industry trade journals, newspapers and industry authority blogs.

The first industry-specific edition of Northern Light Mobile News focuses on information technology (IT). Users can select from news feeds on 100 topics including Enterprise Servers, Network Security, Internet of Things, and Big Data. Users can also opt to receive news feeds on 60 leading IT industry vendors.

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Pharmaceutical, financial services, healthcare, agribusiness and energy editions will follow.

For SinglePoint clients, Northern Light's mobile apps are available in an enterprise configuration and can be customised to present all portal content and not just business news. The app can be downloaded to the iPhone, Android, Blackberry 10 and Windows phone.

Administration

Administrators are able to carry out a number of tasks including:

- Create groups and control who can access them
- Create Expert Searches and folders and edit them
- Create Dashboards and custom folders and links
- Set up and manage the Dashboard accordion
- Add, edit and delete global logins
- View number of page views and requests for full documents by vendor as well as number of documents (by title) viewed by vendor/user
- View total activity query by day and week for specific date range
- View by order of popularity for specified date range
- View total number of expert searches executed
- Query activity done from Quick Search box vs Advanced Search
- View user accounts created, changed and removed for date range specified
- View all active user accounts for specified date
- View saved, changed and removed bookmarks by users for specified period of time
- View all new, changed and removed Saved and Expert Searches during specified period of time
- View number of "Analyze This Company" reports viewed during specified period of time
- View visitor traffic to site along with behaviour, by month, unique visitors, number of visits, number of pages visited, hits and bandwidth during specified periods of time
- View total number of logins and average login per user session by type of account during specified period of time
- Create topic-focused newsletters built on content from portal.

Jinfo's View: Technology

✓ *Search technology developed specifically for strategic business and technology search applications including indexing and relevance ranking* ✓ *Northern Light handles all aspects of implementation, saving both time and money*	✓ *Built-in collaboration tools encourage the sharing of expertise within an organisation* ✓ *Mobile apps useful when not in the office.*

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Value - Help & Training; Competitors; Development; Pricing

Help & Training

As per our last review, in 2013, SinglePoint still offers "help where you need it" in the form of context-specific on-screen tips. As SinglePoint is geared more towards the casual user, its strategic dashboards are designed so that you do not need training or experience to use them. Many users don't need to go deeper than the dashboards or simple search to receive value from the portal.

For the deep features, there are extensive online tips displayed at the place they are most useful throughout the portal. Northern Light provides the text for these in the initial configuration and portal administrators are given edit rights for the online system to enable them to precisely tune the online help for each specific client. Portal administrators are also given extensive training during the initial configuration period.

There are now FAQ and Wiki links to the right hand side of the screen (see Figure 8). The FAQs include tips relating to:

- About this portal
- My profile and settings
- Searching and search results
- Analysing, receiving and sharing search results
- Technical issues.

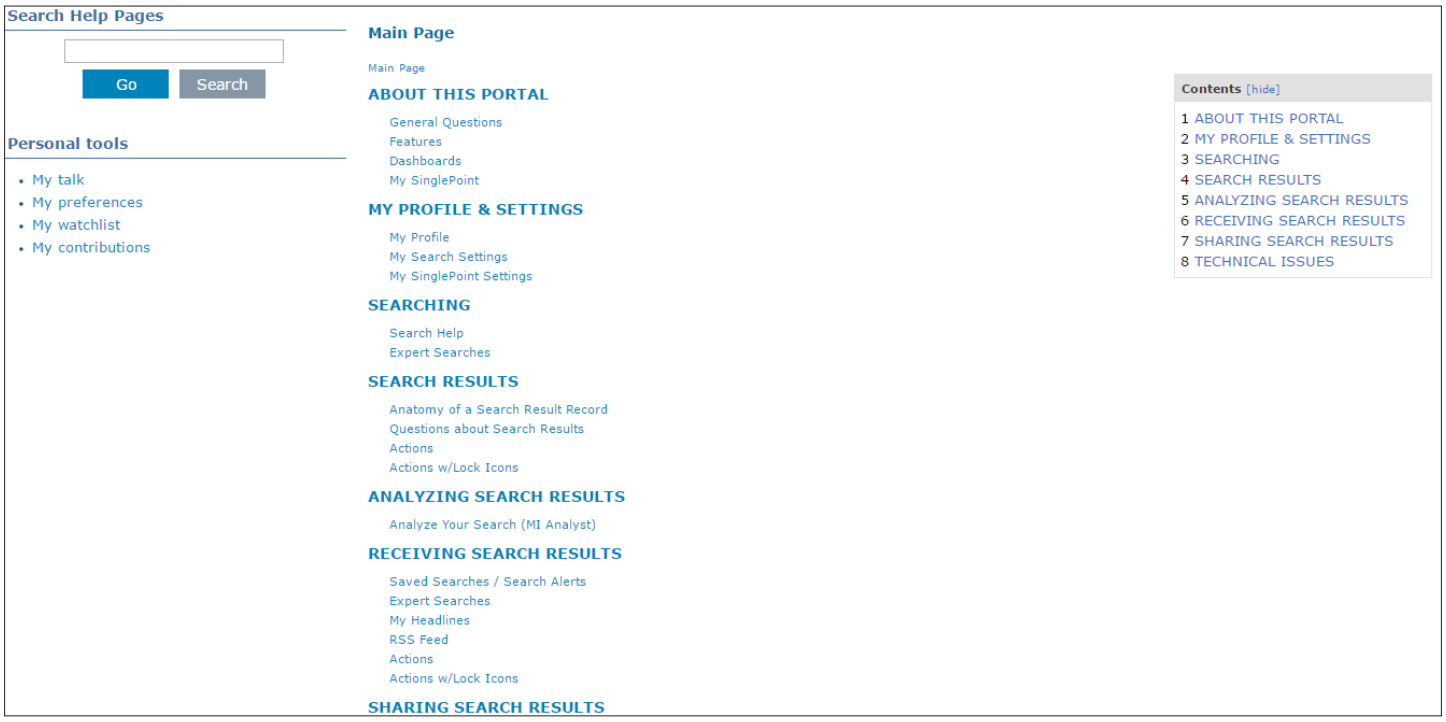

Figure 8: FAQs Page

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The SinglePoint portals may also contain a full featured wiki system. These are generally used for publishing text heavy content to the user community but can also be used to create a collaborative encyclopaedia.

Northern Light offers webinar training to its users every few months. It also meets with its clients on a regular basis to review any changes or adjustments to the portal and its contents, with a more strategic meeting on an annual basis, during which Northern Light will discuss ideas with clients.

Competitors

By far and away the largest competitor to SinglePoint would be homegrown portals produced by internal IT departments using SharePoint. However, many people have moved away from SharePoint over the last two years. In the news arena, which is largely what the competitive intelligence portal segment is about, Factiva (last reviewed by Jinfo in 2015) ranks as the established high quality competitor. However, Factiva is also a content partner and Northern Light integrates Factiva content into many of its portals.

Beyond those two, the only real competition it has integrating third party subscription content comes from federated search vendors that offer connectors. MuseGlobal is the leading federated search connector supplier. However, Northern Light believes federated search is not a good user experience and produces ineffective search results.

Development

Northern Light says a more "Facebook-like" collaboration system could be in the pipeline to replace the current threaded discussion groups later this year or early next year. Also, there will be a new editorial centre that will provide central editorial resources such as expert search libraries, dashboards on popular topics, and graphical objects for use in portal dashboards. Portal admins will be able to clone the central editorial resources into their own portals. This will make creating and updating large numbers of dashboards easier (some of its clients have 40 or more dashboards at present, one has 150).

Pricing

As SinglePoint is a customisable product with many feature options available, it was unable to give exact pricing information. If licensed secondary content is added to Northern Light's news feed, the price would generally be more than $150,000 per year as it is an enterprise-wide application. The cost will depend on what clients select, how many sources they have and which custom features Northern Light adds.

Jinfo's View: Value

Enterprise-wide search applications are generally optimised around simple search terms and can't use metadata or advanced query syntax which produces the "lowest common denominator" search. Federated search is often adopted as one solution to this but this is limited because the indexing strategies, supported search syntax and taxonomies vary depending on the content source. Every search engine returns search results based on their particular relevance ranking method so accurate relevance ranking isn't possible.

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Northern Light aggregates all content by obtaining a full-text original copy of every document from every source and then indexes it with its search engine, MI Analyst. Using consistent indexing, taxonomy, and text analytic strategies uniformly across all sources produces an integrated index that can behave the same way across all sources in terms of search syntax and relevance ranking. It cultivates its search engine to accommodate specific industry needs.

SinglePoint now has a much fresher look and feel since it was last reviewed and the user interface is now even clearer and easier to use. It doesn't appear cluttered despite the amount of information available because of its space-efficient layout. The portal can be customised to the look and feel of each client organisation and encourages the sharing of expertise within an organisation with its built-in collaboration features. Most clients will use their own branding on SinglePoint to make it feel natural so many users don't even know they've left their own company's intranet.

Because Northern Light has been solely focused on providing strategic research portals since 1996, it has a unique insight into what works and has developed a sophisticated portal with unrivalled content aggregation capability that spans a client's entire research collection, both internal and external. It has developed trusted relationships with all content providers and says its aim is to foster a more collaborative partnership with vendors rather than to compete with them. For example, Factiva is a competitor but Northern Light also integrates Factiva content into many of its portals.

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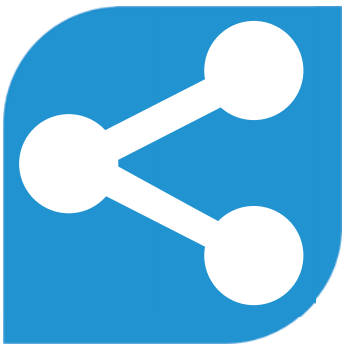

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