

Product Review: The SinglePoint Best Practices Portal

Company Name: Northern Light

URL: <http://northernlight.com/singlepoint/>

Reviewed by:
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Overview

Northern Light's SinglePoint Best Practices Portal is a customizable research portal that simultaneously searches the full text of a company's secondary research subscriptions. Northern Light has negotiated arrangements with 104 research providers, taking that part of the work out of the equation for the customer company. Key users of SinglePoint include market and competitive intelligence staff, market research departments, sales account teams, product

managers, marketing managers, product developers, technology researchers, strategic planners, IT practitioners, purchasing managers, and executive business leaders.

Northern Light's clients are large companies, many of which are in the Fortune 100. Client examples include HP, Verizon, and John Deere. The smallest client rings in at \$2 billion in revenue, and SinglePoint is generally about 8% of a client's content budget. Client content budgets tend to be a minimum of \$2 million.

There is no one competitor to Northern Light that is providing this same type of service and portal, though SinglePoint does compete against proprietary portals created by a company as well as SharePoint sites.

Content Evaluation

Northern Light has agreements with an impressive list of market and technology research content providers. With these agreements, Northern Light can obtain the full text of a report that is included in the client's subscription. The process involves Northern Light working directly with the providers for the indexing and technical integration requirements in a way that best suits everyone involved. In fact, Northern Light says it has a reputation in the industry of being very flexible work partners. Every word of the reports is custom indexed by Northern Light. The full list of 104 market research content sources is included in Table 1.

Table 1. SinglePoint Content Sources

• ABI Research	• iSuppli
• Amazon Research	• Kable Direct
• AMI-Partners	• Kennedy Information
• Analysys Mason (formerly OSS Observer)	• Lexis Nexus
• ARC Advisory	• Light Reading
• Business Insights	• LinkedIn
• Business Monitor	• Lyra Research
• Canalys	• McKinsey Quarterly
• CCS Insights	• Medline
• Celent Communications	• MetaFacts
• Compass Intelligence	• Nelson Hall
• Comtex Newswires	• Northern Light Analyst Views
• Conference Board	• Northern Light Business News
• Corporate Executive Board	• Northern Light Industry Analyst Blogs
• Corporate Insight	• Northern Light White Papers
• Current Analysis	• NPD Group
• Cutter Consortium	• Ovum
• Datamonitor	• Parks Associates
• Decision Resources	• Patricia Seybold Group
• Directions on Microsoft	• Photizo Group
• EBSCO Publishing	• Photofinishing News
• Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)	• Pierre Audoin Consultants
• Elsevier	• Proquest
• eMarketer	• PubMed Central
• Enterprise Strategy Group (ESG)	• Pyramid Research
• Euromonitor International	• Retail Forward
• Everest Research Group	• Saugatuck Technology
• Facebook	• Scrip
• Factiva	• Sirius Decisions
• Faulkner Research	• Slideshare
• FedBizOpps	• Springboard Research
• First Research	• Stat!Ref
• Forrester Research	• Strategic Business Insights
• Frost & Sullivan	• Strategy Analytics
• Gap Intelligence	• Synergy Research Group
• Gartner Group	• Tabb Group
• Gfk NOP	• TBRi
• Global Markets Direct	• TDR Incidence and Prevalence Database
• Google	• TechInsights (formerly Portelligent)
• Heavy Reading	• The 451.com
• IDC Research and Financial Insights	• Thomson Reuters



- Ideas International
- IEEE
- IHS Global Insight
- Infonetics
- Informa Research
- InfoTech Research
- InfoTech Trends
- InfoTrends
- In-Stat
- Tower Group
- Twitter
- US Clinical Trials
- USPTO
- VDC Research
- WatchIT
- Yankee Group
- YouTube
- Zapthink

A client’s already-licensed secondary research is not the only content that SinglePoint will index and search. The product can also include the client’s proprietary internal research in several formats, such as Word, Excel, PDF, XML, and HTML. Northern Light reports that it uses rigorous security measures to ensure that a client’s documents remain confidential, and are available for the intended audience only. Clients can also choose from content collections that SinglePoint has already made available to populate the portal. There is also a variety of news and social media collections available. All content options are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Content Options for SinglePoint

Provider	Types of Content
Market and Technology Research Vendors	Secondary research reports and services from 104 providers
Client	Proprietary internal research
Northern Light Business News	Online business news, premium newswires, and industry authority blogs; contains 50,000 stories per business day from 70 newswires and 8,000 online news sources including Reuters, Knight Ridder, PR Newswire, Business Wire, M2, Xinhua, Kyoto, International Herald Tribune, Financial Times, etc.
Northern Light – Industry Authority Blogs	2,000 daily blog posts from 3,000 industry authority blogs; a blogger must be an industry research analyst, a journalist for a recognized trade publication, or an industry executive, a sponsor company blog, or an industry pundit or guru
Northern Light – IT White Papers	44,000 white papers from 800 leading IT companies
Northern Light – Social Media	Harvests posts and associated comments from the major social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google Blogs, and YouTube. Industry vertical social media platforms can be included as well
Northern Light – Life Sciences Conference Proceedings Abstracts	Aggregated and indexed thousands of abstracts, posters, and proceedings from hundreds of Life Sciences conferences
Northern Light – Government	Government databases for clients such as Medline, clinical trials, patents, or Federal purchasing opportunities
Northern Light – Custom Web Crawls	Can crawl any part of the web and include a searchable index of that material

Source: Northern Light

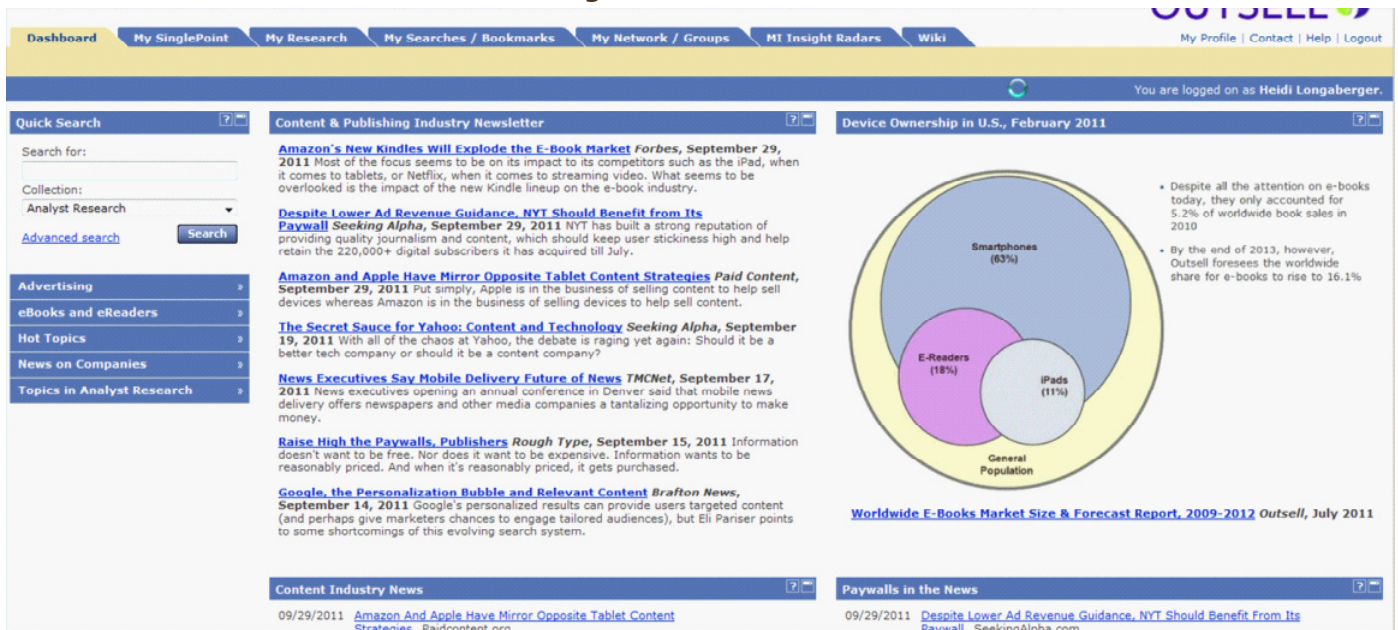
User Interface and Searchability

The SinglePoint interface is easy to navigate and thankfully uncluttered, and centers around a series of customizable tabs along the top of the screen. Each company or department may require different tabs, but the following topics are a representative example of what can be included as a tab:



- Dashboard: This introduction to the platform is set up for the casual user. It is customizable for different user groups and serves as a good marketing piece for competitive and market intelligence groups because it lets the organization at large know what these groups have available. For instance, the market intelligence group can customize a newsletter with links to important research topics and present this on the Dashboard, or highlight a specific graph or chart that can be updated daily. A user with administrative access makes all changes to the Dashboard. Figure 1 gives an example of a Dashboard set-up.

Figure 1. Dashboard



Source: Northern Light

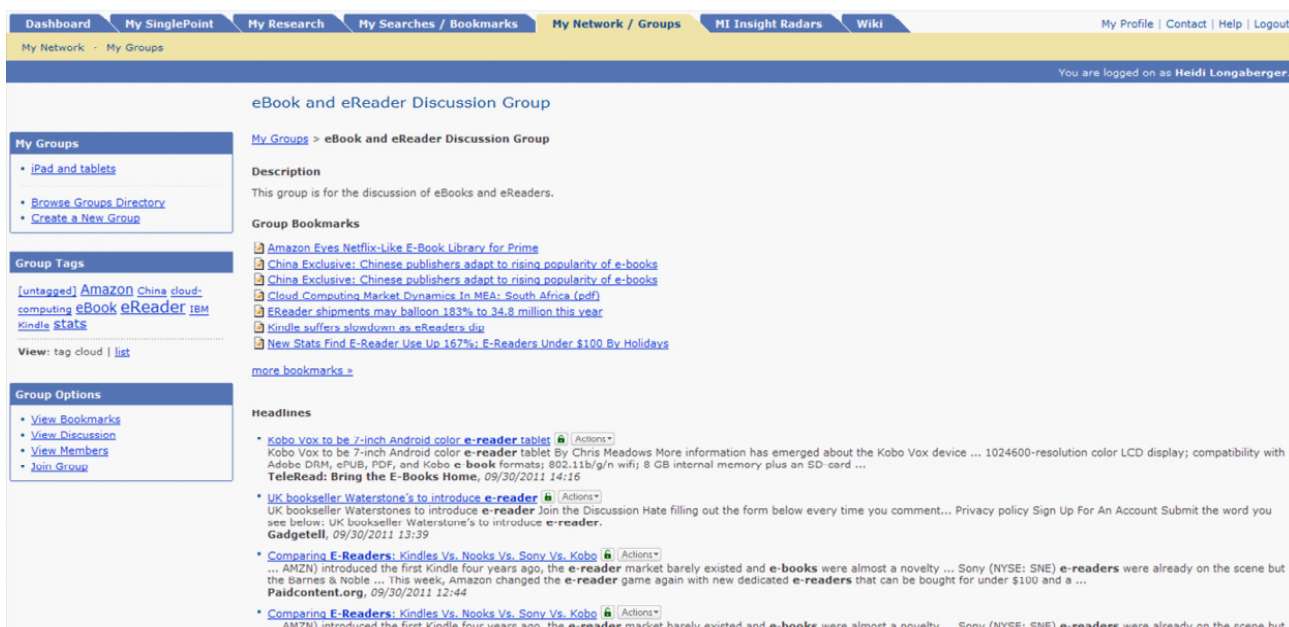
- My SinglePoint: This can be personalized to the specific user. The sections that can be added to the page include Announcements, Booked for Me, Content and Publishing Newsletter, Most Popular Article, Most Popular Bookmark Tags, Most Popular Search Terms, My Bookmark Tags, My Favorite Research, My Groups, My Network, Quick Search, QuickVote, and Stocks.
- My Research: This leads directly to the page listing the analyst research that the user is authorized to access. Users can see either the entire organization's catalog of subscribed services, or only those that their group or position can view; it depends on how the use has been negotiated with the research vendor. Sub-menus may include analyst research, business news, white papers, and the social web. The view is all highly customizable. The user can also search on specific research providers.
- My Searches/Bookmarks: The user can save all searches as e-mail Alerts store them under My Searches. A bookmark is created by clicking the star icon beside each search result. Another interesting feature on this page is how the user can allow others in her organization to access the user's bookmarks and Expert Searches. These are "public" searches that are created and managed from the administration system, either by the portal administrators or Northern Light. Examples of where these features



appear as headlines in the expandable browse section of the Dashboard, and as RSS feeds inside company intranets. Users can request new searches via contact forms, but Northern Light tries to be comprehensive during the portal implementation to create a wide variety of Expert Searches.

- My Network/Groups: In a nod to the increasing use of social media tools within the enterprise, a user can invite others to join her network, or join another’s network in order to share reports and articles. The Groups feature is similar to My Networks, except the user can join another’s Group discussion rather than just a network. Users can also create Topical Groups and list them in a directory. An open Group is for anyone with access to join, while a closed Group is still listed in the directory with membership at the discretion of the administrator. Groups can also be secret, by invite only, or not listed. The example in Figure 2 shows an open discussion Group page.

Figure 2. Groups



Source: Northern Light

- MI Insights Radar: This is an editorial service available by subscription from Northern Light. There are two types of Radars: Company Radar and Events Radar. The Company Radar contains snapshots, links and headlines for the top 200 companies in a specified industry. The Events Radar is a table of all the events, conferences, teleconferences, webcasts, and meetings covering a specified industry.
- Market Intelligence Wikis: Northern Light provides a tool for customers to build their own Wikis in order to provide information for their user communities. An example of a Wiki would be information on a specific vertical industry that would include publically available reports, web resources, news, trends, and issues.



There several ways to conduct a search: quick search, featured in the Dashboard and My SinglePoint pages, includes a simple text search box; advanced search takes the user to the My Research page, where the more extensive menu of search options is available. SinglePoint supports simple keywords, Boolean logic, proximity indicators, field search, or natural language.

MI Analyst is the name of the Northern Light search engine optimized specifically for business research and Northern Light believes it is the only text-analytics capable search engine of its kind. The MI Analyst “reads” all the results, identifies the content, suggests what the concepts and issues are, and directs the researcher to results that are most interesting. This is not from a relevance perspective, but from a meaning perspective. For the purposes of this review, Northern Light created topics, which Northern Light calls “facets,” tailored to a company in the IT sector. These facets are customized for each customer’s industry type, so a search on a life sciences company, for example, would be on “drugs”, “proteins”, “cells”, and “diseases”.

A search on “iPad and forecast” reveals the results list, and the MI Analyst box along the left of the screen, as shown in Figure 3. As this version of SinglePoint was designed for an IT company, the result concepts were categorized under facets including Business Issues, Companies, Venture Funded Companies, IT Technologies, Government Agencies, Global Markets, IT Markets, Industries, Job Title, Strategic Scenarios, Sources, and Authors.

Figure 3. MI Analyst

The screenshot displays the MI Analyst search interface. At the top, the search results are for the query "ipad and forecast". The search bar includes options for "New search" and "Search within results". Below the search bar, there are filters for "Analyst Research (717)", "Business News (3656)", "White Papers (74)", and "IT Analysts Social Web (26)". The main results area shows three items:

- Key Considerations For Designing User Experiences On The iPad** (pdf, pptx, xlsx) by Forrester Research, Inc. (12/09/2010). The snippet mentions that the iPad's larger form factor and users' interest in using it for exploring and consuming larger chunks of content than on iPhones mean that firms must design application experiences specifically for iPad users. Forrester forecasts that by 2015, one-third of US online consumers will own a tablet, and they won't all be iPads.
- Japan Consumer PC User Survey 2010: What is the Suitable PC Type and How Does iPad Make an Impact on the Market?** (pdf) by IDC Market Research (10/28/2010). The snippet states that 96% of respondents that use the iPad for "Internet" highly rate the iPad for its "light weight" and "easy operations." However, compared with respondents that use the iPad for "ebook subscription," the gaps in response rate are not as high.
- Apple's iPad: Identifying Early Adopters and Intentions to Buy** (pdf) by Strategy Analytics (08/20/2010). The snippet indicates that 90% of respondents that use the iPad for "Internet" highly rate the iPad for its "light weight" and "easy operations." However, compared with respondents that use the iPad for "ebook subscription," the gaps in response rate are not as high.




On the left side, there is a sidebar titled "Analyze Your Search" which shows facets for "Business Issues", "Companies", "Venture Funded Companies", "IT Technologies", "Government Agencies", "Global Markets", "IT Markets", "Industries", "Job Titles", "Strategic Scenarios", "Sources", and "Authors".

Source: Northern Light



Each search result includes a number of possible Actions, as displayed in the small pull down menu beside each result.

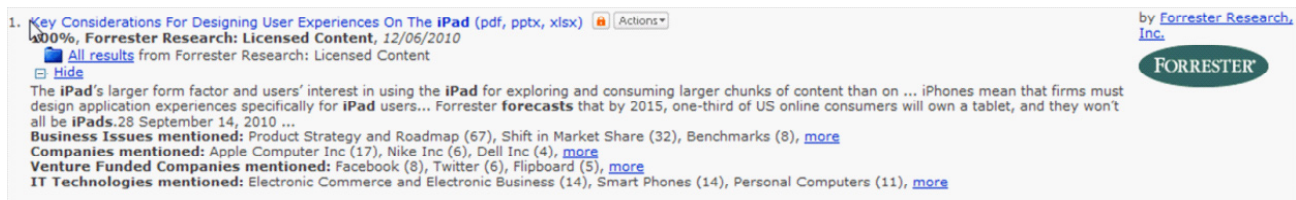
- ? Request – This allows the user to request a locked document from the internal company group, department, or person that has access rights.
- ✨ Save Bookmark – This allows the user to share a result, with added notes, as a bookmark that can in turn be shared with the user’s Networks or Groups. The user can add tags to the bookmark for organizing convenience, including recommended tags by the portal community if the item has already been tagged by others. Users can access tags can under My SinglePoint or My Searches/Bookmarks. Bookmarking and tagging in this manner will be familiar to any user who does the same to internet sites, with the option of sharing tags not unlike public social bookmarking sites such as Delicious.
- ✉ E-mail – E-mails the document link.
- 📄 More Info – This provides a citation, document summary, and entity mentions. This can be e-mailed or bookmarked.
- Saved Login – A place to input the login to specific research providers websites.

The unlocked , or locked  icons will indicate if the user has access to the document. If not, she can then request it from the department that does have access. The  sign indicates the report is not available to the user’s organization, but Northern Light provides a summary, and the individual document may be available to purchase.

The available format for each report is indicated in parenthesis beside the title, and can include PDF, PPT, and XLSX. Also there is a link called “All Results” that will bring up a particular research vendor’s list of results for the query.

Beside each result is its relevancy percentage. Northern Light has a multi-factor approach to relevance ranking that considers statistical text measures, hyperlink analysis, subject classification, and date, and balances all these dynamically to weight the factors based on what will be most useful for a given query. Figure 4 shows the search result in detail.

Figure 4. Search Result



Source: Northern Light



The research reports themselves are served from each vendor's site, just as if the user were accessing news that links out to the web. Northern Light stores the credentials of each user account for each vendor and then the user is automatically logged in to the vendor site and directed to the requested report. Once at the vendor's site the user can print, save, or e-mail either using tools on the site or those within the browser. SinglePoint does not cache and e-mail the report itself, because it doesn't know if the receiving user has proper rights to the report. By sending a link, Northern Light can then log the user in and determine if they have access.

Northern Light has incorporated many features into the portal that encourage collaboration. In this way, rather than just serving as static access tool, SinglePoint can be used as an active communications mechanism. The portal can also market a person's or department's expertise. Besides bookmarking and tagging of reports for the user's own benefit, these can be shared with others in the Group or Network. Users can view tag clouds to see what terms others are searching . Reports can be rated by the user to indicate popularity and frequency of reading. The public user profiles facilitate networking. The "e-mail this page" function allows the user to share links with added user comments. The wiki platform is meant to encourage knowledge sharing. SinglePoint has features of a social media tool and a knowledge management system along with being a research portal.

Competitive Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

- The client can actively measure the usage of the research within the portal, which provides good metrics that can be useful at contract renewal time.
- There are many ROI possibilities: Centralization decreases duplication of subscriptions and purchases, which is often a problem in very large organizations. Also, time is saved for the user as there may be a reduction in the number of portals and websites they have to access to get to their research services. The client's staff required to support the portal is very limited. For example, one Northern Light client has five people supporting 70,000 users.
- Users and departments can communicate their expertise and value to the rest of the organization through the various communication and collaboration opportunities built into the system.
- The portal also acts as a Market Intelligence tool; the user can find experts within the organization, and the wiki and MI Insight supports deeper understanding of industries and companies.
- The information provided at the research result list level is quite useful, from the ranking of the document to the ability to tag and save as a bookmark.
- Northern Light is fastidious about its security procedures, so no content is seen by those who don't have access, or co-mingled with another client's content. The fact that large IT organizations trust Northern Light to access their research is a testament to the seriousness with which security is addressed by Northern Light.
- Northern Light handles directly all the implementation, updating and indexing issues with the subscriber's content provider.



Weaknesses

- The help menu would be more user-friendly if it were searchable and indexed. Northern Light could probably do this quite well, since it does such a nice job indexing content for others. It was time-consuming to find a description of some of the offerings and functionalities.
- This is not so much a weakness as a suggestion: The portal is targeted to large organizations, but it would be valuable for smaller to medium sized research-heavy organizations to have access to a similar system, like a "SinglePoint Light."

Technical Requirements

This is a hosted, software as a service (SaaS) product with no special infrastructure requirements. The portal can be deployed within 90 days of sign-up, with additional requirements satisfied as required. Maintenance and operation from the Northern Light side includes hosting of the user interface and integrated content database via a secure standalone website, building of the database index daily using the new material produced by all the content providers, provision of the network and hardware required, serving of the user search queries, operation of the user account and authentication system, delivery of documents to authenticated users, execution of daily Search Alerts, application maintenance and minor enhancements, and resolution of vendor content delivery problems that develop. SinglePoint is optimized for use on various mobile tablets including Android supported tablets, the iPad, and the PlayBook.

Service and Support

Clients are assigned a Northern Light account team headed by a Vice President to facilitate frequent communications on a weekly schedule concerning requested changes, new content providers, performance enhancements, and new features and functionality.

Pricing and Contract Options

SinglePoint's pricing model is a flat fee for unlimited use across the subscribing department or organization. Each contract usually has a fairly standard service level agreement for response to and resolution of problems, up time, and server response times.

In Outsell's Opinion

SinglePoint is an impressive research portal that also provides an interactive component that draws from both social media and knowledge management processes. Northern Light realizes that true value comes in offering access to people as well as documents. Providing collaboration tools to encourage activity that can be shared, such as Group and Network interaction, or tagging, bookmarking, and e-mailing an interesting link to



a colleague, all promote the exchange of intelligence and ideas. SinglePoint can index not just outside content, but proprietary research as well. Northern Light strives to do this as efficiently as possible, within 90 days from concept to creation, while developing the indexing and updating plan with the content vendor. Though not an inexpensive undertaking, the potential return on investment possibilities makes SinglePoint an attractive prospect for very large companies looking to reduce their spending in content acquisition and deployment.

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Heidi Longaberger, M.L.S, has over 15 years of business research experience in the broadband, telecommunications, cable, media, and venture capital industries. Through her business, Longaberger InformationWorks, she continues to provide research and analysis to a variety of industries and non-profits. Heidi can be reached at Heidi@Longabergerinfo.com and LinkedIn.

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