



SearchFlow Submission to the Cabinet Office Consultation on *Transformational Government: Enabled by Technology*

Introduction

1. SearchFlow welcomes the Cabinet Office's strategy paper on *Transformational Government: Enabled by Technology*.
2. This paper outlines SearchFlow's experience as a licensed channel in the Government's National Land Information Service as a case study for examining the transformational capacity of technology.
3. SearchFlow would be delighted to engage with Government on any points raised in this consultation response in order to facilitate the further successful transformation of government services through the creative use of technology.

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SearchFlow

4. SearchFlow is an electronic conveyancing search service. PSA, the Personal Search Company
5. (PSC) also belongs to PropertyFlow. SearchFlow is the trading name of the PropertyFlow Group.
6. For your information, MacDonald, Dettwiler and Associates Ltd. (MDA), a provider of information solutions, has entered into an agreement subject to regulatory approval to acquire PropertyFlow Ltd. MDA is seeking formal clearance from the Office of Fair Trading for this transaction. This development however does not affect the substance of this submission.
7. SearchFlow provides a one-stop solution for sending and receiving property searches. It replaces paper searches with a more efficient and less error-prone automated system. It provides up-front benefits such as address validation, easy-to-use maps, identification of relevant searches and integrated invoicing.
8. SearchFlow transforms the conveyancing search process from a labour-intensive chore to a simple online task.
9. SearchFlow is one of the National Land Information Service licensed channels.





National Land Information Service

10. The National Land Information Service (NLIS) is a Modernising Government initiative to automate and integrate the provision of land and property information. It aims to make conveyancing and, ultimately, home buying, faster, easier and less stressful for everyone concerned.
11. The NLIS infrastructure has been built by private enterprise creating an electronic distribution structure that replaces the post.
12. NLIS comprises:
 - a. Data providers (local authorities, Land Registry, the Coal Authority, etc.)
 - b. The NLIS hub (effectively a wholesaler without storage facilities)
 - c. The NLIS channels (of which SearchFlow is one)

Electronic transactions

13. NLIS epitomizes the model of, and efficiencies possible through, the use of electronic transactions. Though a significant market exists in paper based personal searches, electronic searches are undoubtedly the future of the search market – in terms of speed, efficiency, and value for money. SearchFlow fully endorses the conclusion of the strategy paper that “electronic transactions should be the norm, and paper transactions processed by front-line staff or intermediaries electronically.”¹

Technology enabled business change

14. *Transformational Government* suggests that “The number, scale and sheer difficulty of public sector projects means that public and private sector capacity to deliver this portfolio is constantly stretched. The capacity and capability of (particularly central) government organisations and their suppliers to deliver technology-enabled business change has been subject to severe criticism by Parliament and the press over the last decade. Public confidence in government’s ability to deliver technology projects reached a low point by the late 1990s.”²
15. SearchFlow would suggest that the NLIS model offers two prospective solutions to this observation.

¹ *Transformational Government: enabled by Technology*, Cabinet Office, November 2005, p11

² *Transformational Government: enabled by Technology*, Cabinet Office, November 2005, p5



16. First, the project illustrates the ability of Public Private Partnership such as NLIS to overcome issues of scope that could not be effectively addressed by the public sector alone. The private sector's contribution of capital and entrepreneurial management introduces efficiencies to the mix that enable an effective market to flourish in the interests of the consumer.
17. Second, the cutting edge technology sourced by the private sector in the pursuit of effective business models avoids the trap of over complexity and the perception that significant public sector investment will overcome conceptual errors in programme design. In particular the use of PISCES by the property sector to communicate information has meant that streamlined efficiency can be built into existing systems without the need to develop or procure complex hubs.
18. PISCES is the XML schema for communicating property data developed by industry and used as a standard for nine years. In some ways the role that PISCES can play in the regulatory regime surrounding house buying and selling has not been realised by Government. Fuller integration of this scheme, as recognised by the property industry, would save public funds.
19. SearchFlow would welcome contributing expertise developed through the partnership with NLIS to the Service Transformation Board on the elements and implementation of common service design principles necessary to deliver effective citizen and business centred services.

Accreditation of electronic information

20. SearchFlow's management team has significant experience in information assurance. With a business model reliant on accurate electronic information and experienced in the development of industry standards, SearchFlow would be willing to engage with the Central Sponsor for Information Assurance to share the lessons learnt over the course of engaging with NLIS and as a leader in the property search industry.