KNOWLEDGE BASE ARTICLE

Smart Search vs. Built-in SharePoint Search: What's the Difference?

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Overview

Every **SharePoint Online site** already has search: the search box at the top of the page sends users to the built-in **Microsoft Search** results page. So why add a search **web part** at all?

This article compares the built-in search with **Vitextra Smart Search** side by side. Both can search SharePoint and OneDrive content and respect user permissions - the difference is in **where** the search appears, **who** can set it up and **how much** of the experience you can shape. The comparison helps you decide when the built-in search is enough, when Smart Search fits better, and how to use them together.

Note

Microsoft regularly updates the built-in search experience. This comparison reflects the capabilities described in Microsoft documentation in 2026. Check the current Microsoft documentation for the latest details.

Built-in search in brief

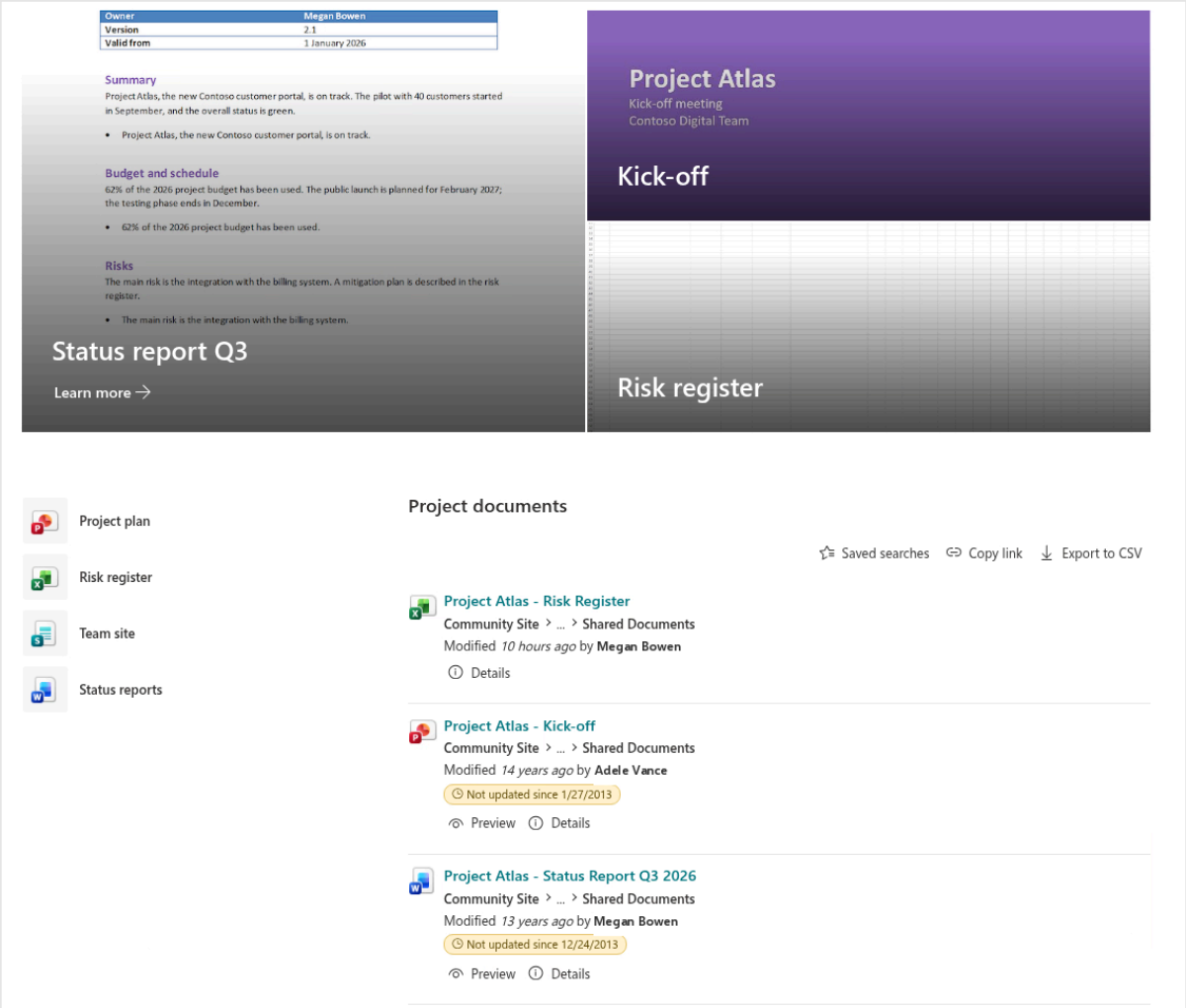
The built-in search experience in SharePoint Online is part of Microsoft Search. Its main building blocks are:

- **The search box in the header** of **SharePoint**, OneDrive and other Microsoft 365 apps. Results open on a dedicated search results page.
- **Verticals** - tabs on the results page, such as *All*, *Files* and *People*. Administrators can rename and disable the default verticals and create custom verticals with a KQL query, at the organization level or for a specific site.
- **Filters** - the default filters plus custom filters on refinable managed properties (text and date properties), configured per vertical.
- **Result layouts** - custom verticals can have their own result layout, designed with the search layout designer based on Adaptive Cards.
- **Answers** - bookmarks, Q&A and acronyms that administrators publish to show authoritative answers at the top of the results.

These settings are managed by administrators in the **Microsoft 365 admin center** or by site owners in the site's Microsoft Search settings, and they apply to the whole organization or to the whole site.

Smart Search in brief

Smart Search is a web part. Instead of a single search results page for the whole site, it places a complete search experience - search box, tabs, filters and results - **inside any modern page**, in any section and column, and in **Microsoft Teams**. Each web part has its own settings, which page editors change in the web part property pane, without admin tools and without code.



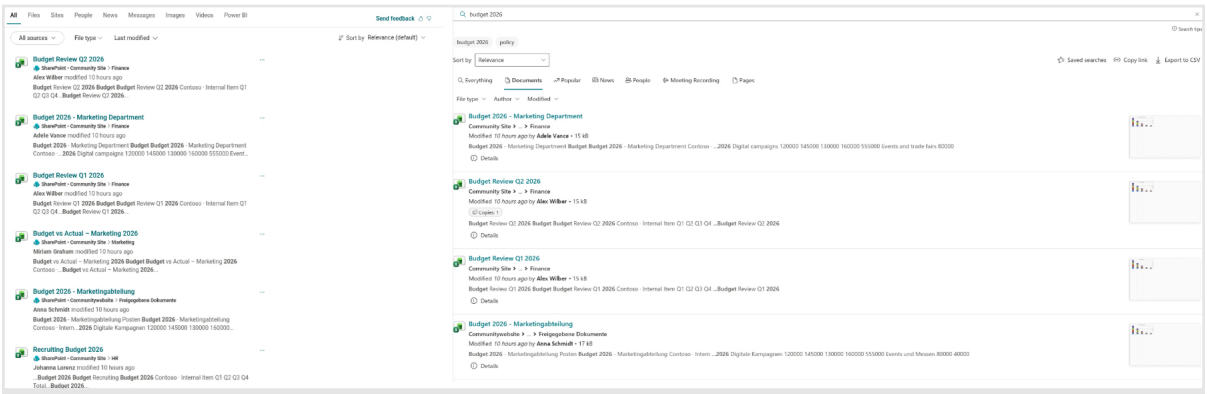
Smart Search as a block on a regular SharePoint page

Side-by-side comparison

	Built-in SharePoint search	Vitextra Smart Search
Where search appears	The search box in the header and a dedicated results page	Any modern page, in any section; a full-page app; a Teams channel tab or personal app

	Built-in SharePoint search	Vitextra Smart Search
Who configures it	Microsoft 365 or SharePoint administrators (organization level), site owners (site level)	Any page editor, in the web part property pane
Scope of a configuration	The whole organization or the whole site	One web part. Several web parts on one page can have different settings
Search scope	Set by the search context (organization or site)	**Tenant**, current **site collection** or current site - per web part
Tabs	Verticals; custom verticals with KQL queries. Reordering verticals isn't supported	Ten ready-made sources, including *Meeting Recording*, *Popular* and *News*; rename, hide and reorder tabs
Filters	Default filters plus custom filters on refinable managed properties	Ready-made refiners (file type, author, modified date, tags and more) plus any refinable **managed property**; date refiners with quick periods and a custom range; order and display names configurable
Result layout	Fixed layout for default verticals; Adaptive Card layouts for custom verticals	Ten on/off elements (path, summary, tags, thumbnail, file size, views and more) and the summary length - no layout code
Actions on results	Open the item	Open, plus **Preview**, **Play** and **Download** in a dialog without leaving the page
Usage insight	-	Views count and a 7-day chart of daily views and

	Built-in SharePoint search	Vitextra Smart Search
		unique viewers on each result
Shareable state	Query in the address	Query, tab and page number in the address (`?q=…&source=…&p=…`)
Branding	Microsoft 365 look	Follows the site and section theme and **SharePoint Brand Center** fonts
Answers (bookmarks, Q&A, acronyms)	Yes	No
External content (Copilot connectors)	Yes, through connectors and custom verticals	No - SharePoint and OneDrive content only
Cost	Included in Microsoft 365	Separate product with a free trial



The same query in the built-in search and in Smart Search

When the built-in search is enough

The built-in search is the right choice when:

- users mostly search from the header box across the whole organization;
- the default verticals and filters cover what people look for;
- you need **answers** - bookmarks, Q&A or acronyms - or results from **external systems** through Copilot connectors;

- search is managed centrally by administrators, and per-page variations aren't needed.

When Smart Search fits better

Smart Search is the better fit when search needs to be part of the page itself, or when page owners need control without admin rights:

- **Search blocks on regular pages** - *Project documents* on a project site, *Latest policies* on an HR page, *Meeting recordings* on a team page - each with its own source, scope and layout, next to other web parts.
- **A tailored search center** - tabs named in your organization's terms, only the sources people need, date filters with quick periods and a result layout that matches the page.
- **Working with results in place** - previewing documents and playing videos and meeting recordings in a dialog, without new browser tabs.
- **Seeing what people use** - views counts and a 7-day **view** chart on each result.
- **Search in Microsoft Teams** - the same search as a channel tab or a personal app.
- **Ready-made searches** - links that open a specific query on a specific tab, for use in navigation, news or emails.

Using them together

The two don't exclude each other. Two common setups:

- **Keep the built-in search in the header and add Smart Search blocks to pages.** Users keep the familiar global search, and pages get focused, pre-configured search blocks.
- **Send header searches to a Smart Search page.** Set a Smart Search **app page** as the site's **Results page URL**. The query typed in the header is passed to the page in the q parameter, and Smart Search shows the results with your tabs, filters and layout.

Tip

To create a Smart Search page and make it the site's search results page, see KB10223. How to Create a Search App Page with Smart Search. For a regular page with other web parts, see KB10058. How to Create a Custom Search Results Page with Smart Search.

Good to know

Warning

Smart Search uses the standard SharePoint **search index** and search API. Results depend on the configured query, scope and filters, as well as the user's permissions. The built-in Microsoft Search page may include additional sources and answers and use its own personalization, so its results and their order can differ.

- Smart Search shows SharePoint and OneDrive content only. Answers and external content from Copilot connectors stay in the built-in search.
- Tabs are based on ten built-in sources; creating a new tab with your own KQL query isn't available in the web part settings.
- People results come from user profiles in the search index; for a full-featured employee directory, consider a dedicated directory web part.

Tip

For an overview of all Smart Search features, see KB10222. Smart Search. Solution Overview. To deploy the web part, see KB10035. How to Install a Vitextra Product in SharePoint Online.

Learn more about the product: *https://vitextra.com/en/products/smart-search*

Terms

App Page
An app page in SharePoint Online is a specialized type of page designed to host a single web part or app. It provides a focused, full-page experience dedicated to a specific functionality, allowing the app to use the entire page space without other distractions. This layout is ideal for scenarios requiring a large amount of data display or complex interactions, such as dashboards, data entry forms, or detailed reports.

Managed Property
A managed property in the SharePoint search schema defines what data from crawled properties is included in the search index. Managed properties have a large number of settings that determine how the content is shown in search results. Managed properties can be used in search queries to specify which information to return.

Microsoft 365 Admin Center
The Microsoft 365 admin center is the web portal where administrators manage users, groups, licenses, domains, billing, and services for a Microsoft 365 tenant.

Microsoft Teams
Microsoft Teams is a chat-based collaboration platform for business communications with features for online meetings, live events, and document sharing.

Search Index
The search index is the store of content and metadata that the crawler has processed and that search queries run against. Only properties that are mapped to managed properties are included in the index.

SharePoint
SharePoint is a web-based collaboration platform that provides content management, document management, workflow applications, search, and other tools that empower employees and teams to work together. SharePoint is also a secure place to store, organize, and access shared information.

SharePoint Brand Center
The SharePoint Brand Center is a centralized tool that helps organizations manage and maintain their branding assets, such as logos, colors, and fonts, ensuring

consistency across SharePoint sites. It streamlines the branding process, allowing teams to easily access and use the correct materials for creating branded content.

SharePoint Online
The cloud version of SharePoint, a web-based collaboration platform within Microsoft 365 that provides an extensive range of capabilities to store, share, and manage the digital information, content, and knowledge of an organization.

Site
A SharePoint site is a container for information within the SharePoint platform. Sites typically offer features such as document libraries, lists, calendars, discussion boards, and workflows, facilitating collaboration, communication, and document management within teams or across departments. Sites can be customized and configured to suit the specific needs and workflows of an organization.

Site Collection
A site collection is a group of one or more SharePoint sites, subsites, and related content. A site collection typically shares common settings, permissions, and configuration, providing a cohesive environment for users to work together on projects, departments, or specific areas of focus. Site collections are often used to separate content and control access rights based on organizational structure, security requirements, or project needs.

Tenant
A Microsoft 365 tenant is a dedicated instance of Microsoft 365 services. The tenant holds the organization's information, such as users and domains (Microsoft Entra ID), configurations, subscriptions, and services. An organization receives a tenant by signing up for Microsoft 365 services.

View
A view is a saved configuration that determines which items of a list or library are displayed and how, including the columns, sorting, filtering, grouping, and layout. Views can be personal or public.

Web Part

Terms

A web part is a primary building block of functionality or content placed on a SharePoint page. Some web parts support customization, such as configuring the web part or changing its appearance.