

KNOWLEDGE BASE ARTICLE

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



Disclaimer

For the purposes of this Disclaimer:

- **Company** (referred to as either "the Company", "We", "Us" or "Our" in this Disclaimer) refers to Vitextra SIA, LV-1009 Riga, Matīse iela 61 - 25.
- **Document** refers to the Knowledgebase Article.
- **You** means the individual accessing the Document, or the company, or other legal entity on behalf of which such individual is accessing or using the Document, as applicable.
- **Website** refers to Vitextra, accessible from <https://vitextra.com>

Disclaimer

The information contained in the Document is for general information purposes only.

The Company assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions in the contents of the Document.

In no event shall the Company be liable for any special, direct, indirect, consequential, or incidental damages or any damages whatsoever, whether in an action of contract, negligence, or other torts, arising out of or in connection with the use of the contents of the Document. The Company reserves the right to make additions, deletions, or modifications to the contents in the Document at any time without prior notice.

Errors and Omissions Disclaimer

The information given by the Document is for general guidance on matters of interest only. Therefore, errors can occur even if the Company takes every precaution to ensure that the Document's content is current and accurate. Plus, given the changing nature of laws, rules, and regulations, there may be delays, omissions, or inaccuracies in the information contained in the Document.

The Company is not responsible for any errors or omissions, or for the results obtained from the use of this information.

Fair Use Disclaimer

The Company may use copyrighted material that the copyright owner has not explicitly authorized. The Company is making such material available for criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, or research.

The Company believes this constitutes a "fair use" of any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the United States Copyright law.

If You wish to use copyrighted material from the Document for your own purposes that go beyond fair use, You must obtain permission from the copyright owner.

"Use at Your Own Risk" Disclaimer

All information in the Document is provided "as is", with no guarantee of completeness, accuracy, timeliness or of the results obtained from the use of this information, and without warranty of any kind, express or implied, including, but not limited to warranties of performance, merchantability and fitness for a particular purpose.

The Company will not be liable to You or anyone else for any decision made or action taken in reliance on the information given by the Service or for any consequential, special or similar damages, even if advised of the possibility of such damages.

Contact Us

If you have any questions about this Disclaimer, You can contact Us by email: support@vitextra.com.

Table Of Contents

Overview	4
Built-in search in brief	4
Smart Search in brief	5
Side-by-side comparison	5
When the built-in search is enough	7
When Smart Search fits better	8
Using them together	8
Good to know	9

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 search the same Microsoft 365 content and respect the same 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.

Markdig.Syntax.ThematicBreakBlock

Built-in search in brief

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

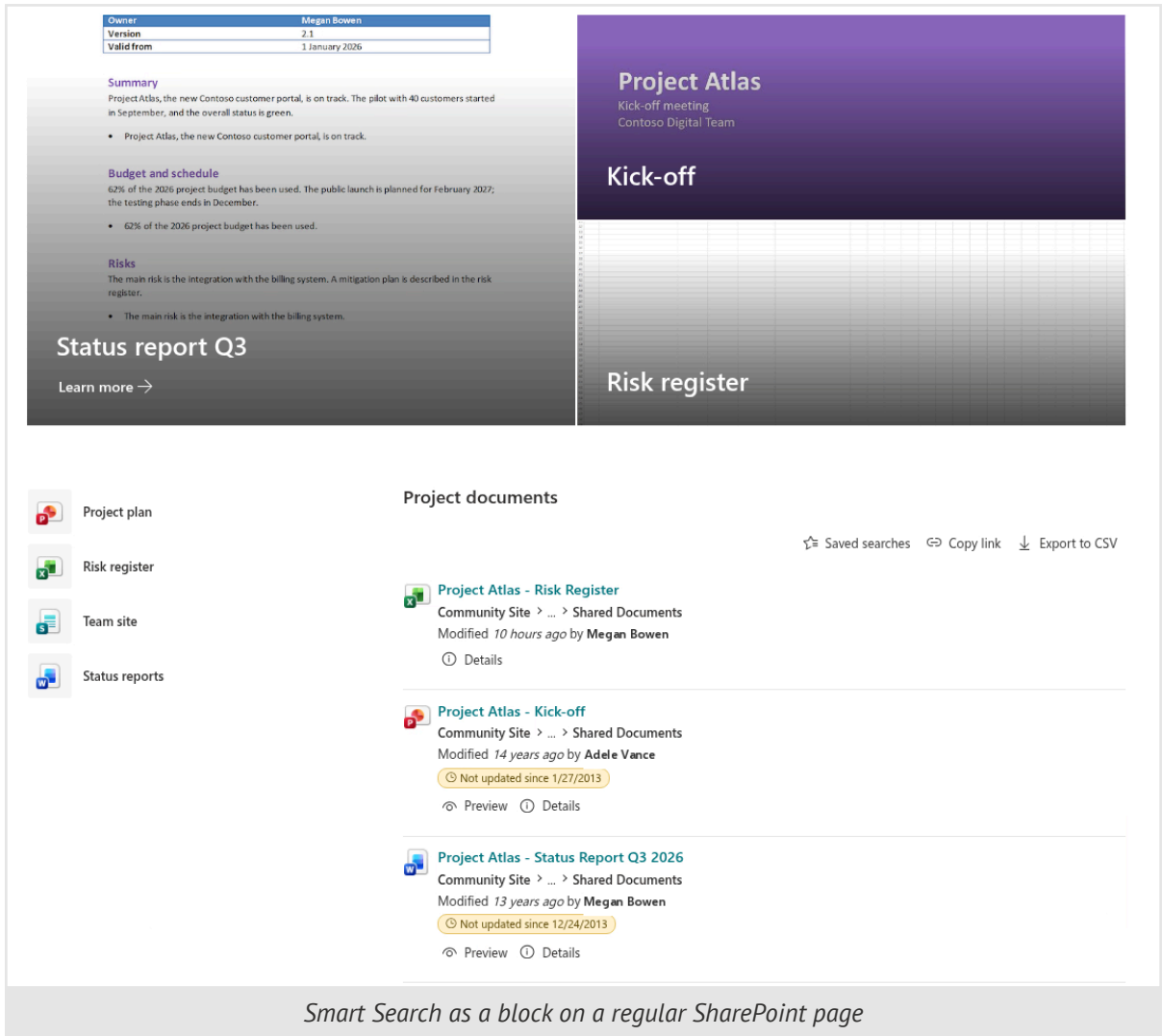
- **The search box in the header** of SharePoint, OneDrive and other Microsoft 365 apps. Results open on a dedicated search results page.
- **Verticals** – tabs on the results page, such as *All*, *Files* and *People*. Administrators can rename and disable the default verticals and create custom verticals 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.

Markdig.Syntax.ThematicBreakBlock

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.



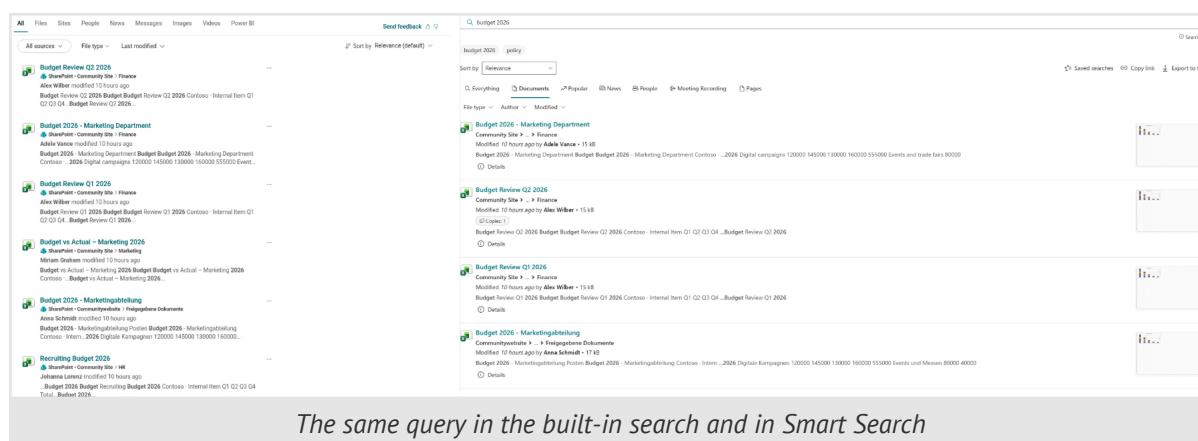
Markdig.Syntax.ThematicBreakBlock

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 <i>Meeting Recording</i> , <i>Popular</i> and <i>News</i> ; 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

	Built-in SharePoint search	Vitextra Smart Search
		chart of daily views and 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



Markdig.Syntax.ThematicBreakBlock

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.

Markdig.Syntax.ThematicBreakBlock

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.

Markdig.Syntax.ThematicBreakBlock

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. Build a Custom Search Results Page with Smart Search](#).

Markdig.Syntax.ThematicBreakBlock

Good to know

Warning

Smart Search doesn't replace the search index or the ranking. It uses the standard SharePoint search index and the SharePoint search API, so it finds the same content that SharePoint search can find – no more and no less. The order of results may differ from the built-in Microsoft Search page, which uses its own personalization.

- 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. Installing Cloud-based Product](#).