The Algolia model provides search as a service, offering web search across a client's website using an externally hosted search engine.[8][9] Although in-site search has long been available from general web search providers such as Google, this is typically done as a subset of general web searching. The search engine crawls or spiders the web at large, including the client site, and then offers search features restricted to only that target site. This is a large and complex task, available only to large organisations at the scale of Google or Microsoft.

Algolia's product only indexes their clients' sites and so the search task is far simpler. Data for the client site is pushed from the client to Algolia via a RESTful JSON API,[10] then the search box is added simply to the client's web pages.[11] This search model is intended to give the performance and sophistication advantages of a full in-house search engine operating on the native web site back-end database, but with the simplicity of setup of using a site-restricted Google search.