

Title: Harnessing Collaboration: SharePoint and Document Management

News Outlet: ECM Connection

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Introduction

A new dynamic is changing how information is captured and shared within the enterprise, and organizations are discovering that a solution for many of their workplace challenges may already be available to them. That solution is Microsoft Office SharePoint 2007, which is a server program that is part of the 2007 Microsoft Office system. SharePoint is software that enables collaboration via a private, secure intranet. The software also enables richer, more seamless collaboration, while improving content management, promoting business process implementation, and enabling faster and more powerful access to information across an organization.

More specifically, Microsoft Office SharePoint Server provides a comprehensive application development and scalable integration framework for building highly customized internal and external Web sites (also known as portals). The software makes it easy to build and maintain portal sites for every aspect of your business.

Microsoft SharePoint is evolving from its original use as a collaboration tool, and now new document management components can be directly integrated into it. This means that the same enterprises that have already invested in Microsoft SharePoint can combine their SharePoint systems with their current content management systems.

Since many people are familiar with the basic collaboration components of SharePoint, it is a small step to integrate it into their current ECM capabilities. One basic example of this integration involves incorporating SharePoint with Microsoft Office. This single, effective integration brings the power of the SharePoint system directly to the user, yet requires only minimal IT intervention and support.

Why SharePoint?

Imagine having all needed files stored in one location, yet having them accessible by **all** authorized personnel -- inside and outside the organization -- no matter if they are located across the country, around the globe, or just down the hall. SharePoint facilitates connection and collaboration.

Web-based collaboration systems are not the solution for everyone. Some organizations, due to various security guidelines, limit or prohibit external access to their systems, which makes a Web-based solution impractical. In these situations, employees cannot access their documents. But in many cases, they *can* access their email application. One advantage in using SharePoint is that Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 now works with Microsoft Office Outlook 2007 to provide a sophisticated way to work *offline* with SharePoint data.

For example, let's say you are working remotely, need access to your documents, and do not have external access to your Web-based system. If you connected your SharePoint library with Outlook, you would have offline access to your data. You will be able to open, edit and save your documents. When you connect to your intranet, Outlook 2007 processes a Send/Receive command, and your edits to a document will be updated to the master copy of the document stored on the SharePoint Server 2007 site. By using Outlook to connect to SharePoint data, users have a single place to look up and modify schedules, contact information, documents, and tasks; while new items are available in one place without accessing different SharePoint sites.

Some organizations rely on specialized enterprise business intelligence packages that are provided by EMC, IBM and Oracle. These packages are tailored for specific business applications such as financial, product life cycle management, and supply chain management. While these large enterprise solutions have a place in many larger businesses, they can be costly for small and mid-size organizations to implement and maintain, and generally require specialized training to use.

Many organizations that are not a good fit for these large enterprise systems can find a solution in SharePoint. While SharePoint does not offer all of the specific functionality of these larger systems, it does offer the basic workflow functionality needed by many organizations. SharePoint's out-of-the-box workflow makes it possible to route a document to assigned personnel in order to approve or reject it, reassign or approve a task, or request changes to a document. Other options include document "check-in, check-out," versioning control, and document profiling throughout the document lifecycle. It also supports a workflow approval process to ensure compliance with certain requirements. However, SharePoint lacks the graphical ability to generate workflows through process designers. Though it is possible to leverage Visual Studio on a desktop, this is uncommon for most SharePoint users

When required, more advanced and customizable workflows can be developed by a certified solutions provider. These systems can, for example, automatically verify data submissions through integrated exception handling and data validation. They can accelerate approvals and facilitate document tracking by using electronic signatures with workflow steps and

electronic forms. These workflows enable the exchange of data between external systems to make routing decisions or to synchronize data across multiple applications.

Benefits of ECM and SharePoint

Despite advances in automation, in many workplaces a number of manual processes remain in place. Yet when document management is properly integrated into SharePoint's collaboration platform, a variety of benefits can result:

- **Speed.** Speed-to-market is critical (for example, in industries such as insurance and banking). It is crucial to be able to access vital business information. With ECM and SharePoint it is possible to get information into the system and make it available right away.
- **Accessibility.** Centralized file storage was appropriate when everyone worked in one main office. Now, with workers distributed throughout the country and telecommuting, information needs to be available to people electronically.
- **Portability:** Mobile devices are constantly becoming more intelligent. It is now even possible to access a SharePoint on mobile devices. For example, imagine reading a needed invoice from your cell phone, or enabling your customers to do the same.
- **Records Management:** New regulatory guidelines are placing pressure on corporations and government agencies to make records management a priority. Ideally, records management systems should be easy to adopt, manage and secure, and should preserve your historic records, expand access to public records, and meet regulatory compliance needs.

Right now, SharePoint has no integrated document capture piece. There are some very good solutions in the market today that will address this. If your own records management requirements are complex, you may also need to integrate, customize, and extend your existing document and records management solution. One popular choice is Microsoft Records Management, a solution within Microsoft SharePoint that automates records management policy throughout a document's life cycle. From creation and collaboration to records declaration, policy-driven retention, as well as final document disposal or archiving, this solution helps you collaborate and share information securely across boundaries, protect document integrity and reduce legal risk.

Are you Right for SharePoint?

To determine if SharePoint is the right solution for your organization, consider the needs shared by most organizations, regardless of industry. For example, many business processes require sophisticated process flows and integration with a variety of external systems. In this situation, a unified process and control system spans each stage of the lifecycle, linking engineering and IT

operations, and encompassing all major enterprise platforms, applications, locations and players.

Other organizations have special requirements. For example, **federal, state and local governments** often rely on many dispersed and ad hoc information repositories. Chances are that each one is doing something different. These systems cannot typically be incorporated due to limitations of data storage structures or out-of-date proprietary software. **Businesses** often find themselves in the situation in which a salesperson needs to close a sale, but cannot access or cross-reference needed information. In this case, SharePoint can 'crawl' for information from dispersed repositories and search for needed materials. For example, imagine a scenario in which 15 sales representatives work out of their homes. These reps require a central place to get the company's latest marketing materials. With SharePoint, it is possible to search for and get specific information quickly, and be assured that it is up to date thanks to versioning control, a big advantage of SharePoint.

More specifically, many **small businesses** recognize the great potential in providing products and/or services to organizations in different time zones. One of the enormous advantages of SharePoint is that it can play a major role in a small business' ability to provide customers with around-the-clock service while keeping overhead down. In many **large organizations** there are many manual, time-intensive processes that are necessary for everyday business activity.

An example of one of these processes involves managing paid time off (PTO). One large organization needed to manage PTO for 500 employees. The previous process was very labor and time intensive, taking hours each week to track and provide up-to-date data to employees. Using SharePoint, the PTO information could be extracted from a limited external resource, loaded into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and automatically populated onto a SharePoint portal site. Now, each employee can log-in to the site and access his or her PTO information only. The solution also incorporated InfoPath forms, which employees could use to request time off while on the same web site. After the form is completed, SharePoint launches a workflow process that automatically routes the request to the appropriate manager for approval. This solution freed up several hours a week of processing time that could be used for more productive tasks.

Another example would be a law firm that relies on many external resources to pull together all of the needed information before a big trial. In the past, the firm had staff members who were required to make calls to gather the appropriate information. Many times, documentation was faxed, mailed and sent by courier. Documents then had to be copied and assembled. Keeping track of the versions was difficult at best. The overhead costs and delays in disseminating the information could have made the difference in winning the case. The firm deployed a SharePoint site to resolve many of these issues. Now, external resources can upload needed documents directly to the firm's SharePoint site and the firm has immediate access to the content. This system has many advantages, such as tracking versions and audit trails, and now there is one central location for all documents – in addition to benefits offered by the many other inherent features in SharePoint. This also gives the staff more time to do discovery work.

Specific needs to consider include the following:

- **Continuity.** All organizations have the need to maintain continuity during staff changeovers. When one or more people leave an organization, valuable information such as records, emails, correspondence and company processes are likely to be lost. In the case of acquisitions or mergers, in which there are multitudes of moving data and personnel, it can be difficult to track it all.
- **Storage.** Once the only alternative, paper documentation still holds an important place in business and government, yet organizations pay a high price to house their old paper files and records. Historical information can be made available electronically via an ECM system.
- **Security.** In an age when one Gig of data can vanish in seconds, identify theft is a constant concern. All information must be locked down. Security and access can be strictly controlled with SharePoint.
- **Compliance.** Many organizations must conform to compliance regulations, such as Sarbanes-Oxley or HIPPA.
- **Automation.** Almost any organization has manual processes that could be automated.
- **Contingency.** Most organizations need to create a contingency plan in the event of a disaster -- flood, fire, tornado, etc. -- that could result in the permanent loss of data.

Next Steps

Cost is usually a consideration when adopting a new system or solution. However, with SharePoint, many organizations already own the application through a prior purchase – making it easier to get started. However, implementation must be seamless in order to avoid potential pitfalls down the road. Further, organizations can expand their existing investment in SharePoint by investing smartly in ECM. Together, SharePoint and ECM provide a powerful, scalable and systematic solution for today's modern workforce.