



Small
Business
Monthly

JUNE 2010

What SharePoint Can Do For You

HOW THIS COLLABORATION TOOL CAN HELP YOUR EMPLOYEES COMMUNICATE AND STAY ORGANIZED.

As small-business owners, we are constantly on the lookout for tools that can help make our operations more efficient. Microsoft SharePoint has the potential to be one of those tools for you.

Simply put, SharePoint is a collaboration tool. It gives users an easy mechanism for sharing information – calendars, documents, schedules or any other data. SharePoint provides an organized, central repository to simplify information sharing.

Microsoft offers a free version of SharePoint (known as Windows SharePoint Services, or WSS) that is available with most Windows Server operating systems; it also offers an expanded version (Microsoft Office SharePoint Server, or MOSS). As an introduction to SharePoint, we'll focus on features included in both WSS and MOSS.

SharePoint is organized into “sites.” Each project or category included in SharePoint has its own site. Sites can contain subsites, libraries and pages and are created using either the templates delivered with SharePoint or a custom template that you design. An example of a SharePoint site could be a project repository, containing the project schedule, all supporting documentation for the project, a wiki of terminology for the project and a discussion board for issue resolution.

Document and file management are the cornerstones of SharePoint. SharePoint can configure your library structures, maintain versions of your documents, keep track of who is working on a document through check-in/check-out functions and manage approval workflows.

Work spaces provide a way to tie all relevant information about something together. For instance, the workspace for an upcoming meeting could include the meeting details (location, attendees, call-in information, etc.) and a place for all attendees to contribute their agenda items.

Workflow automation is another key feature of SharePoint. Steps within the workflow are easily configured and assigned to users. SharePoint then takes over, tracking the steps identified, notifying users when the workflow has reached them and ensuring that all steps in the workflow are completed. A good example would be proposal preparation: One person puts together the shell of the document, another adds pricing information, and you review it for final blessing before delivery to the client. SharePoint workflow could manage the process and notify each person when the document was ready for their input.

Key to success in any organization is effective communication throughout the team. SharePoint provides easy-to-use tools for blogs, wikis and discussion forums. Blogs provide a means for a single author to disseminate information on a topic. Wikis are akin to an online glossary and are great for building common language throughout your team. Discussion forums are a tool for gathering information from a variety of people. Within SharePoint, blogs, wikis and discussion forums can be set up for a site or a work space, depending on where the information is most relevant.

SharePoint isn't a tool that you can just decide one day, “I think we'll use SharePoint today.” A little thought process is required to determine how to break your workload into sites, what steps should be defined in workflow, etc. Start small; pick one project and use SharePoint to see how it can support your needs. I think you'll find that with a little planning, SharePoint can add efficiencies to your organization that you didn't know you were missing. ■

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GADGET GURUS

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