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The SharePoint Revolution and its Impact on Business and IT

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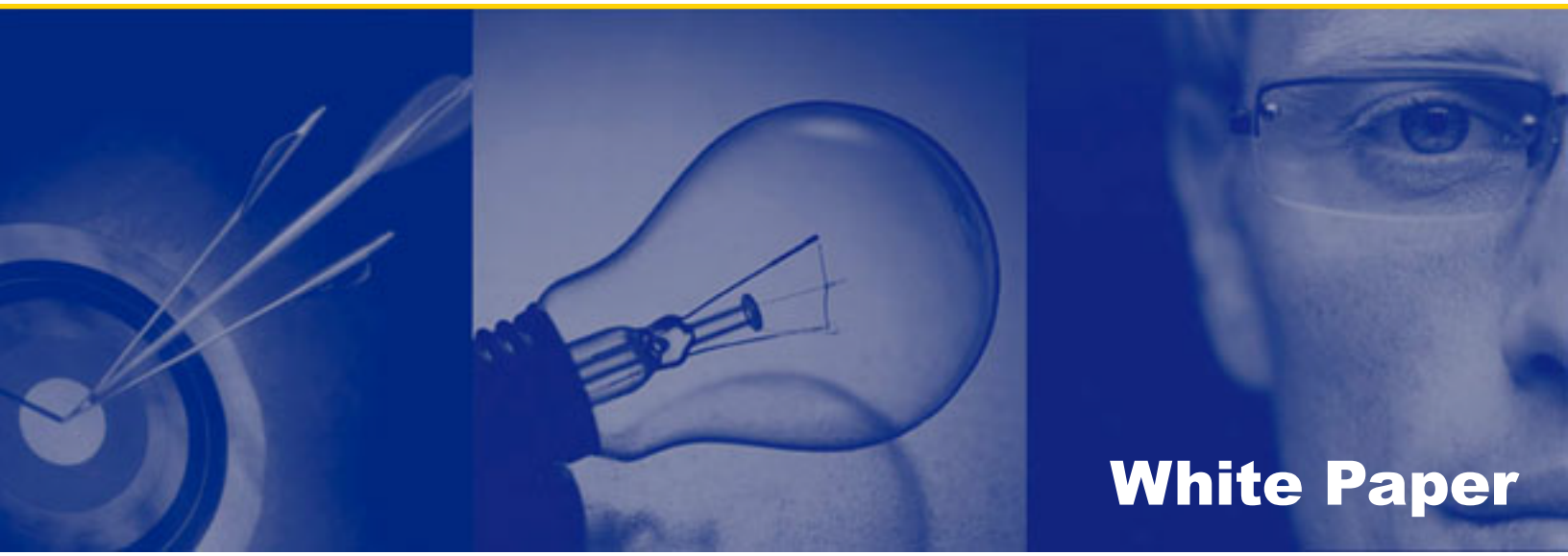

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Updated—August 8, 2006

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WHY SHAREPOINT? WHY NOW?

2007 is shaping up to be the year of SharePoint. In the last four years, Microsoft SharePoint has been building up its install base and consuming market share. This is primarily due to three factors. First, Microsoft is the de facto standard within most organizations. Second, the base version of SharePoint referred to as Windows SharePoint Services or WSS, is free with the base OS—Windows. And third, there is an increased need for collaboration within organizations. Furthermore, Microsoft makes adoption easy for business owners by making the install relatively simple. Teams are able to create a meaningful Web portal in minutes without having to go through cumbersome approval or technical processes. With the impending release of SharePoint 2007, it is expected that this growth trend will explode.

In this whitepaper, we will examine in more detail why collaboration is becoming so important, how SharePoint is becoming one of the standards for collaboration and how businesses need to be aware of this imminent shift in how businesses operate.

Collaboration Market Trends

Collaboration is nothing new. Subsequent decades since the invention of the telegraph has shown more and more technology applied to what has been a vexing problem—how do you effectively get teams to share information to reduce the risk of project failure and increase their efficiency. Early attempts with formal IT technology such as File Shares, e-mail and such platforms as Notes proved adequate for what most companies were trying to get out of their infrastructure; but the holy grail of collaboration is still undiscovered.

Increasingly SharePoint is seen as the next step in the evolution of collaboration. Web portals are relatively new but a growing aspect of the collaboration space. According to Gartner and other sources, the portal products market has had year-over-year revenue growth of more than 10% between 2003 and 2005[i]. These portal products include the various types of Web infrastructure that are used to create intranets for teams to collaborate. For example, this would include J2EE application servers, BEA and IBM Portal solutions, SharePoint portal servers and more specific products for particular tasks such as document management (OpenText, Documentum, etc.).

In addition to the commercial product offerings, business owners need technology to get their work done, and savvy teams will gravitate towards easy-to-deploy technologies to give them maximum return on their investment. Today that includes many Web-based intranet technologies built on services like Apache and PHP: Wiki Webs, blogs, chats, instant messaging and project management tools. SharePoint can now be added to this list.

However, SharePoint has emerged as one of the rock stars in this market because of its ease of deployment, its richness in support and complete integration into Office 2003 products. With the impending release of Office 2007 and SharePoint 2007, this integration becomes complete. Microsoft is reporting SharePoint Portal Server 2003 growth numbers over 50% year-over-year and projecting even more through 2007. Amazingly this does not take into account the explosive growth of Windows SharePoint Services (WSS) that are bundled into every copy of Windows Server 2003 for free.

The ease with which new team sites can be created in Windows SharePoint Services in just a few minutes has won over many teams that would have gravitated to ad hoc solutions in the past. Templates allow teams to easily create new sites with calendars, meeting managers, discussion forums and other collaboration features. The simplicity of WSS has made it an obvious candidate to steer teams to standardize on a single collaboration solution. This has made SharePoint the only portal software that has been and can be embraced by business owners as opposed to being driven by IT.

The collaboration within departments and throughout the organization is phenomenal. However, who is managing this crucial platform that holds an organization's business together? Organizations are now realizing that when their SharePoint environment is not functioning, their business is probably not functioning either. This is a looming demand for IT resources that needs to be addressed.

Competing Demands for IT

There is a compelling analogy to SharePoint and the adoption of NT. In the late 1980s, it was mostly IT that managed a series of Novell or Banyan servers and maintained fairly tight control over these resources. Savvy business owners were looking for more reliable and robust technology. They implemented capable NT4 domains that allowed them to have a security boundary and document libraries. IT initially fought hard against this grassroots adoption of NT but ultimately lost out to the business need. Forward thinking IT organizations will adopt SharePoint as a corporate standard early on and acknowledge that this will create an intense strain on already limited IT resources.

But because SharePoint and other ad hoc Internet collaboration technologies, such as wikis and blogs, are experiencing widespread grassroots adoption, IT departments are becoming stretched for resources to manage these emerging platforms. In many cases, they are scrambling to catch up to the demand to create a strategy, an immediate plan, and most importantly a budget to manage SharePoint. This results in being pulled in two directions: business process owners, such as the CFO and COO, want management and secure collaboration, and the departmental teams want stable, fast internal systems accessible at all times. However, it is usually the business owners of a company that take precedent over the need for IT to have stable controlled environment; so IT will have to adopt the management of SharePoint on terms they are not used to.

In most cases, the old 80/20 rule applies: 20% of the customers are responsible for 80% of the demands for the IT department's time. As the owners of business processes that are critical to the operation of the business (e.g. CFO for financial reporting; COO for supply-chain management and other ERP applications), CxOs are the most important IT clients with the greatest demands. Increasingly, IT will be helping these stakeholders automate their business processes using SharePoint and Office tools with the need to ensure that the production servers hosting these processes are running smoothly.

Virtual teams also want IT's time to set up new intranets for team collaboration. IT administrators may find themselves too stretched for time to provision new servers or sites for these teams, but they may not want to incur the risks involved in hosting them on production servers. In most cases IT teams will gravitate towards a management framework that will work for them and their business teams.

A Collaboration Shift

One of the biggest drivers behind the growth in collaboration tools today is productivity improvement in critical business processes.

Organizations are looking to automate complex business processes, such as financial reporting, to meet increasingly stringent compliance requirements. Business groups are working with IT organizations to manage these processes using SharePoint and Office tools for collaboration. For example, Remedy Staffing[ii] turned to Office and SharePoint to enable employees to collaborate on Sarbanes-Oxley compliance activities efficiently and to avoid additional staff to manage paperwork.

In another example, as part of their Connecting for Health initiative[iii], the National Health Service in the UK has embraced SharePoint as a core technology. SharePoint allows them to achieve collaboration among their remote entities and to realize subsequent cost savings by allowing teams to collaborate over wide distances and within many disciplines.

Surprisingly, you don't have to be a huge organization or government entity to achieve this level of collaboration. Many individual groups within the enterprise, such as small workgroups or cross-functional teams, have the need to work together more productively. These teams want to focus on tasks related to their projects and deal less with managing information (e.g. progress reporting, meetings, minutes, etc). They also look for easy-to-use collaboration tools and are gravitating towards SharePoint to help manage these activities.

One of the attractive things about SharePoint is the template model that allows teams to quickly choose the collaboration approach that works best for them. And because templates can be shared, more experienced SharePoint users can provide them to less practiced team members and offer them a compelling list of templates optimized for their business. This will further accelerate the adoption within organizations.

SHAREPOINT'S IMPACT ON BUSINESS

The rapid adoption of SharePoint is a watershed event in terms of an organization's ability to reduce technical costs and support footprint in both small and massive collaboration projects. This will lead to a huge increase in the number of virtual teams that can effectively work together. Businesses can easily calculate the ramifications of not supporting collaboration technology when comparing the costs of traditional portals or traditional collaboration processes such as meetings, travel and calls.

Employees have also discovered how effective the SharePoint technology can make their projects. The document control feature alone alleviates the inefficiencies of sending e-mails back and forth with huge amounts of data attached each time a revision is made to a project document. To combat this, individual SharePoint team sites are built, and critical business information is posted at an increasing rate. Information from all over the company, such as company policies and procedures, strategy documents, departmental budgets, development plans, engineering diagrams, product training manuals, shipping documents and many more, are housed on SharePoint sites.

The Promise of SharePoint 2007

In early 2007, Microsoft will release a major and significant upgrade to SharePoint called SharePoint 2007. This version extends the capabilities of SharePoint to include formal workflow, rights management, support for blogs and wikis, tighter integration with Office 2007 and some significant increases in the ability for organizations to search for information within their SharePoint organization.

As with SharePoint 2003, the base version of SharePoint 2007, still called Windows SharePoint Servers (WSS), will be available for free to anyone who buys the base OS. Based on the already high degree of adoption, SharePoint 2007 will certainly accelerate the adoption of SharePoint.

Organizations can get ahead of the curve by giving their business owners information about SharePoint 2007 and putting policies into place for the creation of SharePoint 2007 sites when the product become available.

THE IMPACT ON IT

As always, when business owners take it upon them to deploy software that becomes an underpinning of the company, IT is eventually forced to step in and take manage it. The impact of all these intranet deployments and SharePoint servers has had an uncertain impact on resources that IT is responsible for, such as network bandwidth and shared storage. This will increase the support demands from the IT team. (In the worst cases, there is a loss of substantial information because no comprehensive backup strategy was put in place. In other circumstances, these intranet solutions can create bottlenecks on network resources that degrade overall performance and take valuable time from network administrators to identify.) With an ever-increasing number of these teams already using SharePoint, it makes sense for IT to drive all teams to adopt SharePoint as the standard collaboration platform.

Compliance also becomes a pressing issue right off the bat. Business owners are usually focused 100 percent on their own business. They will not understand security requirements of new SharePoint sites in the context of the compliance environment we are in today. IT will need to step in, hopefully early enough in the process, to maintain the protection of crucial documents and prevent any major compliance issues from arising.

It's critical for an IT team to focus on taking control of the infrastructure management responsibility for the entire SharePoint inventory as soon as possible, while continuing to allow business teams to leverage SharePoint in they way they are used to. This presents a new challenge for IT. It will be critical to the success of any standardization effort to ensure smooth operations on the corporate network, and requirements achieved without seriously impacting the IT workload.

Supporting the Business for SharePoint

Organizations must put some general policies into place around SharePoint. It should be made quite clear that SharePoint is an option for business teams and support for business owners should continue. Organizations that put constraints on business owners around SharePoint will find that the rules will be just be bypassed. There are few tools that will not allow teams to put SharePoint servers in place, and most of these are voluntary. Organizations that felt they had implemented realistic procedures disallowing SharePoint have found that SharePoint has been adopted anyway and in some cases has accelerated. It is unlikely that the continued rapid adoption of SharePoint can be stopped by internal policies outlawing its use. With few exceptions, business trumps IT's need to control and is something that needs to be understood. SharePoint is a valuable tool for organizations and IT will be forced to provide support in a very short timeframe if they are not in synch with the business.

How IT Can Support SharePoint

Standardizing on SharePoint frees IT from dealing with support concerns around different platforms, but still leaves IT with substantial additional responsibilities. For all of the SharePoint environments in the organization to run smoothly, IT must begin to actively manage them. To be in a position to do so, the IT department must be able to:

- Determine what SharePoint inventory exists
- Understand how SharePoint is being used in their organizations
- Perform capacity planning for all SharePoint servers
- Ensure the appropriate access controls are in place to protect the security of information that's being shared
- Support efforts to guarantee consistency of shared information and proper reviews are conducted to secure the accuracy of critical information
- Assist in migrating content to SharePoint from previous solutions used for collaboration, such as Exchange Public Folders

IT teams are faced with the daunting prospect of dedicating many more resources to SharePoint infrastructure management. To handle all this SharePoint growth, IT needs productivity tools that provide full cycle management for SharePoint to protect their most vital "libraries" of business information.

FULL CYCLE MANAGEMENT FOR SHAREPOINT AUTOMATED DISCOVERY

Because of the nature of SharePoint's design, it is extremely difficult for any single person in the organization to be aware of all of the SharePoint servers and sites that need to be centrally managed. The servers themselves may frequently reside in different geographic locations and be owned by different groups. In many cases there is no communication with IT before these sites go operational. Additionally, there may be a combination of deployments of Windows SharePoint Services and SharePoint Portal Servers. Groups can deploy their own SharePoint servers and with user site creation and additional sites can frequently crop up.

What's needed is a tool that can quickly identify all servers and sites across the network and bring them into a management framework for administrative purposes. A concise summary is required to identify how many servers and sites exist as well as indicating how many servers have accessibility problems. The tool must be able to discover all types of remote SharePoint deployments, including WSS on a single server or Web farms running SharePoint Portal Server 2003 and eventually SharePoint 2007.

To offer better control over discovery time and to ensure that no servers are missed, the tool should allow search scopes to be constrained to include domain, organization unit or individual computers and definition of which ports to scan when looking for SharePoint Web servers.

Browse and Access

A SharePoint site can be anything. For an IT administrator who doesn't know the purpose of many of the servers and sites in the organization, it is difficult to fully understand how SharePoint is being used to affect improvements in business tasks and collaboration.

What is needed is a management framework that gives IT the ability to browse through all of the SharePoint objects from virtual server, site collections and sites on down to individual items such as documents in document libraries, tasks, messages or other items in lists. Selecting any element in the navigation tree should allow you to view the content. In many cases, this will give IT their first major insight into the impact of SharePoint.

SharePoint management is spread among many individual Web pages at the server and site level. To quickly access administrative functions, the tool must provide direct access to native management tools. It is very hard to both find and remember all of the various pages and see them in a more centralized manner. Administrators must be able to rapidly drill-down to the exact element of the SharePoint inventory they wish to deal with and reach administrative functions in one step.

Report and Analyze

The immediate concerns for any IT organization that has recently adopted SharePoint are how active the sites are and how rapid the data store grows. These can put an immediate strain on three key resources more than anything else: (1) the network bandwidth of the hosting server and the utilization of network links; (2) storage utilization for the server and sites within it; (3) the amount of CPU and memory used for the database and searching and indexing activities. Monitoring and management of these resources entails getting a reliable picture of the usage of the server and its utilization of these resources over time.

To support these decisions, IT requires a tool that automatically collects data from multiple sources (SharePoint and IIS logs, performance counters, Web services) on every SharePoint server. From the gathered metrics, productivity tools can provide easy-to-read reports summarizing the critical metrics, statistics and trend data needed for analysis that drives policy decisions around resource limits, capacity planning and other management activities.

Bolstered with this information, IT will have a deep understanding of how SharePoint is being used and can begin to put a more formal active management approach in place. This will ensure that the business can continue to leverage their SharePoint deployments.

Policy Management—Security

Based on reporting, business owners and IT can grasp a deeper understanding of how SharePoint is being used within the organization. With this understanding of security, capacity and general management concepts, most IT teams will now want to deploy meaningful policies that can be globally deployed and centrally managed.

Policies include, but not restricted to:

- Setting particular permissions or rights for a given site group that meet compliance requirements
- Setting e-mail alerts for new content
- Setting storage quotas
- Defining access control lists as restricted site groups and managing the membership and permissions for that group
- Choosing to close anonymous access to sites

In today's business environment, senior managers need to be aware of material that is being produced by business processes they own. They also need to be aware of how effectively that information is being compiled. To ensure this, the content owners and a number of reviewers will need to know all about the financial reporting activities and when new documents or drafts are created. A number of other participants may also need to be aware of collaboration activities, such as discussions, meetings or task assignments.

For example, financial reporting is governed by Sarbanes-Oxley legislation (SOX) in most enterprises. When this is the case, the CFO has to certify not only accuracy of the results but that suitable internal controls exist over their production. The regulatory framework adopted may not be SOX, but must reflect some of the same tenets.

To ensure that the right people are always kept in the loop, IT requires a tool that provides policy control over alert lists and identifies who is notified of content changes. It must be possible to add the email addresses of different participants in the process to either of two alert lists so they are notified of changes in documents, or changes to collaboration tasks or messages.

To use another financial reporting example, a policy can be created for each participation role in the financial reporting process. Within that policy, properties will specify the alert list for site libraries and for site lists. By editing the policy, new email addresses can be added to each alert list. Once all of the policies are created, they can then be linked to the collaboration sites for financial reporting.

Managed Migration

As SharePoint becomes a standard within organizations, pressure will mount to migrate information to SharePoint. Microsoft has given some guidance that new collaboration tasks should be placed within SharePoint. According to the official Microsoft Exchange team blog, "For all new collaborative application development, we recommend WSS v3 and the new E12 Web services as your platform"

Microsoft heavily promotes the use of SharePoint site lists for workgroup discussions and information sharing that might have been done with Exchange Public Folders in the past. As new teams transition to using SharePoint team sites as the primary workspace for managing their collaboration, there is an increasing desire to migrate old content to the SharePoint site as well. For most organizations, this would involve the use of Outlook to access public folders for discussion groups, meeting management and other communications tasks now handled by SharePoint.

Without tools to automate migration activities, the planning and execution of any migration program would be very difficult and time-consuming to achieve.

Automated migration tools can manage the migration for the IT administrator. An effective migration tool needs to map the public folder content onto one of a number of different possible target types: site, document library or site list. The choice between target types may be determined by what is being migrated and by how effectively the target maps the existing folder permissions onto the SharePoint security architecture. Any tool should be able to establish appropriate defaults for users and permission mappings to ensure that the same types of access controls exist after the migration.

Once an initial migration is complete, one-way synchronization is needed to allow new items in public folders to be reflected in the new team workspace until the transition to SharePoint collaboration is complete. In this way, new items added to public folders using Outlook (such as appointments and tasks) are also visible to SharePoint users.

Migration tools need to be switched over to the new SharePoint collaboration environment in a managed cutover. This ensures a smooth user experience for all team members and allows any teething pains with the new environment to be worked out in a manageable fashion. After the switch, Outlook users should be directed to SharePoint by displaying the SharePoint site or discussion list in the preview pane.

Recovery

All too often, a user mistakenly deletes a document or item or encounters a corrupted item caused by a failure. Unfortunately, SharePoint administrative tools only support site-level backup and recovery. It is very time-consuming for administrators to restore full site content to a temporary location to extract only the items that were lost. This approach is also flawed because meta-data, such as revision logs or time stamps, may be lost in the process. An effective recovery tool needs to be able to recover one or more items from an available backup on an individual basis.

Conversely, it isn’t feasible to simply overwrite the current contents of the entire site with older content. Full cycle management for SharePoint requires a recovery tool that can manage periodic backups of content and meta-data wherever they reside. For example, content may be stored on a file share, while the revision information is kept in the SharePoint content database.

CONCLUSION

SharePoint use is exploding and companies are jumping on the collaboration bandwagon for cost-effective management and to keep up with competition. Refer back to the examples of Remedy and the UK Health Initiative; these companies have embraced SharePoint and rely on it daily to run their business. There are thousands of other companies in the same situation. How are they managing SharePoint?

In these times, IT organizations will need to adapt and accept this emerging platform that has grown all around them. But IT can't do it with their current resources and with the current tools; they need tools that can help them efficiently manage SharePoint, from finding sites to supporting them.

Quest Software offers comprehensive SharePoint enterprise management products that help eliminate the risk associated with the growing SharePoint platform. With Quest's vast experience in management and migration products, we can provide the support you need as you grow your SharePoint environment now and in the future.

Visit www.quest.com/sharepoint to learn more about the features and benefits of the new Quest products for SharePoint Management.

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NOTES

[i] Gartner Dataquest (May 2005), Worldwide Portal Product Market Share, New License Revenue, 2004 (Millions of Dollars)

[ii] Microsoft Case Study: Remedy Staffing Sarbanes-Oxley Compliance Process www.microsoft.com/office/showcase/sarbanes/default.mspx

[iii] http://www.e-health-insider.com/news/item.cfm?ID=1493