

Five Best Practices for Deploying SharePoint Alongside ECM Suites

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Gartner analysis shows that organizations of all sizes and across all geographies are considering or evaluating Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 (MOSS 2007), because of the breadth of capabilities offered and because Microsoft is already one of their strategic infrastructure providers. As SharePoint takes hold in an organization, users naturally begin exploring its suitability for a wider range of content management applications and its potential as a replacement for existing solutions.

Key Findings

- Microsoft delivers effective, basic content management functionality via its Windows SharePoint Services (WSS) 3.0 product, and moves closer toward enterprise content management with MOSS 2007. This product also offers collaboration, search, forms, workflow and portal capabilities.
- Though it covers a broad spectrum of capabilities, MOSS 2007 is not yet a full enterprise content management (ECM) system. Organizations requiring advanced content management capabilities and process-centric applications will need to augment their capabilities with partner offerings, or deploy MOSS 2007 alongside an ECM system rather than as a replacement for it.

Recommendations

- Investigate whether MOSS 2007 might be sufficient on its own or whether it will be best utilized as an adjunct to another content repository.
- Assess the potential points of overlap, redundancy and conflict between the ECM and SharePoint environments, and create a program for periodic monitoring and evaluation to prevent them from becoming a problem.
- Create governance guidelines on when to base applications on SharePoint or on the production-level ECM platforms.

ANALYSIS

Since January 2006, Microsoft SharePoint has been one of the top search terms on Gartner's Web site. Analysis of this search trend data, Gartner user survey data and client interactions (Microsoft was the top vendor mentioned for ECM and collaboration-focused client inquiries in 2007) indicate that IT leaders, information architects, business planners and application managers view Microsoft as a strategic partner and are looking to understand SharePoint's suitability for their content management needs, including records management. All too often, however, SharePoint (both WSS and MOSS) deployments are occurring by happenstance.

Microsoft's strategy of delivering basic capabilities by making WSS a downloadable technology that appears to be free to the end users has facilitated a viral adoption pattern. In order to control the proliferation of WSS sites, IT leaders and planners find themselves moving up to MOSS 2007 as an aggregation tool and portal, and to provide richer functionality around search, workflow and content management. In addition, business users frustrated with the complexity of existing ECM systems are pressuring IT to "make SharePoint work."

Gartner recommends that planners and architects take a proactive stance regarding the growing demand for SharePoint by developing a strategy and planning regiment for deployment that maps the business and requirements to the technologies and platform capabilities. This note covers five best practices for proactively developing a strategy for SharePoint deployments alongside other ECM systems.

Top Five Best Practices for a Coexistence Strategy

1. To ensure that SharePoint does not become another content silo, build or update your enterprisewide content management strategy to address collaborative and basic content management.
2. Build a broad inventory of existing content management applications and repositories and assess the investment levels in those before bringing in another platform such as SharePoint.
3. Define business requirements and the corresponding technical and functional needs, which may span collaborative and process-centric content applications. Map your content management products to them with an eye toward minimizing the redundancy in application development, IT operational or other costs.
4. Examine the integration points required between MOSS 2007 and an ECM suite and assess the availability tools and technologies to ensure interoperability.
5. Establish and enforce governance policies regarding when to use and when not to use SharePoint.

Build or Update Your Enterprisewide Content Management Strategy

In many organizations, adoption of SharePoint is driven by misperceptions that it is a low cost product or by organizational politics rather than by a thorough examination of the total cost of ownership and a needs analysis. SharePoint is not necessarily free or low cost and, depending on requirements, may not be the best option. In the Strategize and Evaluate phases of the Applications activity cycle, application managers considering deploying SharePoint should first develop an enterprisewide strategy for all of their content management needs. Gartner recommends that information architects and application managers carefully consider the role that Microsoft's WSS or MOSS 2007 can play as an integral part of their overall content management.

Through client interactions, Gartner has collected many data points on SharePoint's challenges regarding its suitability as an ECM platform. These challenges include server replication issues, scalability, significant infrastructure costs, inability to support compound documents, and limited process management capabilities. These limitations have led most client organizations we speak with to implement WSS or MOSS as an adjunct to, but not a replacement for, current ECM platforms.

Inventory Existing Content Management Applications and Repositories and Assess Investment Levels

Before bringing in another product, companies must first assess what their business needs are, and examine what they have in their current IT environment. Gartner's research consistently demonstrates that most organizations suffer from redundant costs because of overlapping CM systems. In our December 2007 survey of more than 400 respondents, 67% of enterprises had more than six repositories (see Note 1). In many cases, these multiple repositories consist of departmental solutions, and the content is often duplicated in other repositories in the organization.

In addition, companies must determine what content exists in the enterprise and how it is used. They can then make decisions about whether or not their existing ECM products are meeting their needs, or if they need a tool like SharePoint for simpler requirements. SharePoint is a good tool for projects that have a beginning and an ending, rather than acting as just another repository for storing content without a unifying theme or purpose. Organizations will need to factor in its impact with regard to application development and on other parts of their IT architecture.

As part of their strategic analysis, IT leaders and application managers should also perform a cost-benefit analysis of SharePoint versus other ECM systems. While the costs of SharePoint products and technologies may seem modest at first, additional costs for storage, database and server licenses, customization and implementation services can increase the total cost of ownership dramatically. Gartner has talked to several customers who are getting bids for extensive implementations in the range of \$500,000 to \$1 million (or even more), bringing it more in-line with the costs of traditional ECM suites.

Define Business Requirements and the Corresponding Technical and Functional Needs

Before rolling out MOSS 2007, assess your content management requirements and the use cases for your existing content management applications. This will ensure you are picking the right tool for the task, rather than pushing MOSS 2007 to support applications for which it was not designed, such as production document imaging or content archiving.

Content that is part of a collaborative process may be more useful if shared in a basic content services (BCS) environment such as SharePoint, instead of on file shares or leaving it on hard drives. Handling this content in a BCS tool enables better management

and version tracking, collaborative editing, streamlined review and approval processes, and better access to the content. Typical SharePoint use cases include replacing shared file drives and eliminating inappropriate use of e-mail as a means of storing and routing documents. Be aware that the cost for storing information on SharePoint, instead of a file share, is likely to be higher. This is because SharePoint stores its content in SQL Server and it will probably mean higher costs in terms of database licenses.

SharePoint does not support compound documents, which are documents comprising multiple elements, such as a Word document with a spreadsheet or an engineering drawing embedded in it. This feature is important especially with regulated industries and manufacturers. SharePoint is not designed to be a full archive and is not suitable for archiving static images, e-mail messages and data. Hardware and software partners enable paper documents to be scanned into SharePoint libraries, but Microsoft's workflow capabilities are new and are not suitable for tasks such as invoice processing or patient records. Organizations will want to avoid using SharePoint for customer data, information that must be retained for compliance, and for complex processes that span departmental boundaries.

Over time, IT leaders and application managers will also want to review how SharePoint applications are performing, evaluate future releases of SharePoint as a platform for content management, and determine whether a continued coexistence strategy makes sense.

Examine Integration Points and Assess Tools for Interoperability

Architects and planners must carefully consider the concept of integration points in a coexistence strategy. For some enterprises, simply giving users access to both systems so that they can make informed decisions will be quite sufficient. In this case, using MOSS 2007 for its portal capabilities makes considerable sense. It can serve as an interface aggregating multiple WSS sites and content sources.

Similarly, consider using SharePoint as the client user interface into existing content repositories to improve usability. This use case enables knowledge workers to access back-end content repositories from a familiar and more intuitive application. This can improve user adoption and reduce user training requirements because it leverages a familiar interface and Microsoft Office integration. Several ECM suite vendors, including EMC Documentum, Open Text and IBM/FileNet, provide integration to support this scenario.

For organizations with deep needs around ad hoc collaboration and project team support, it may make sense to implement SharePoint in parallel with an ECM system. In this case, consider SharePoint as a tactical basic content service providing a place to store, find and deliver documents and other content associated with project-related activities or work-in-progress content. When content is deemed final and needs to be kept long-term, it should be moved into an ECM system.

For other organizations where broader information consistency and consistent semantic representations are critical, strategy will become somewhat more complicated. Issues like federated search, metadata strategies, and interoperability between content and records management systems will be critical considerations as you consider SharePoint deployments. Although ECM vendors are touting their ability to integrate with SharePoint, it often isn't integration as much as copying files over. If you are evaluating integration, always attempt to have "one version of the truth." Having one document in SharePoint and allegedly a duplicate in an ECM system invites data integrity issues – which one is the right one if they aren't the same?

Note 1. Survey Methodology

In December 2007, Gartner conducted a Web-based survey of organizations and their usage or intent to use processes and technologies related to information management.

Gartner completed a total of 895 surveys, with a representative set of survey results from key countries (the U.S., U.K., France, Germany, India and Australia) with the goal of getting a global view of data warehousing, data integration and data quality, database management systems (DBMSs), enterprise information management, content management and search. Soft quotas were used to ensure a reasonable spread across all industries, including a restriction on the number of IT firms in the sample. Organizations surveyed were midsize to large, with a minimum of 500 employees.

Given the nature of the questions asked, we specifically targeted individuals in information services or operations. Individual respondents within the target organization had to meet the requirement of having knowledge regarding vendor selection and deployment of one or more of the surveyed subject areas. In addition, all respondents were made aware that their answers would be treated anonymously.

The following definitions were provided to respondents during the survey in order ensure consistency in semantics:

- **Data Integration:** The access, aggregation and synchronization of data between and among multiple data stores of independent design.
- **Enterprise Information Management:** An operational commitment, to define, secure, maintain and improve the integrity and efficiency of information assets across business boundaries, thus achieving key objectives of an organization's enterprise information architecture strategy.

Source: Gartner

Most traditional ECM suite vendors have begun to embrace and extend SharePoint with native Web parts integration. Microsoft itself, however, needs to do a better job at “playing well with the others.” Although .NET and Web services make it easier to interface with other architectures today, Microsoft would better serve customers by supporting other fundamental formats and protocols. True standards support is more critical than ever before as organizations seek to use SharePoint alongside other portals and content management platforms. SharePoint is built on .NET, and Microsoft does not support the Java Specification Request (JSR) 170 standard for repository integration, relying instead on its partners for this support. On the portal side, SharePoint can consume Web Services for Remote Portlets (WSRP), but does not provide an automated way of producing it. Customers with Java-centric environments can implement SharePoint by leveraging its Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) interface and WebDAV for document access. Though progress still must be made, Microsoft announced a broad interoperability initiative in February 2008.

Establish and Enforce Governance Policies

To be most successful with SharePoint deployments, users must put governance techniques in place. When properly deployed and governed, SharePoint promises to aid workgroup productivity for many organizations. Begin by setting a plan for suggested and appropriate uses, as well as delineating any circumstances where SharePoint should not be used. At a high level be sure to consider the scalability and replication shortcomings in these mandates. High volume production environments are not suitable use cases for SharePoint. IT leaders and application managers in the Execution phase of the Applications life cycle will be responsible for deploying and supporting SharePoint as well as for ensuring that users receive the proper training and guidelines for usage.

IT departments should set a firm policy on the life of team sites and documents within SharePoint team sites. Allowing the uncontrolled growth of SharePoint and SharePoint-stored content may result in compliance, storage and user issues. Monitoring compliance with these policies will also be critical.