

The Role of Collaboration Tools for SharePoint



Creating a Competitive Advantage

Improving productivity is, on its own, one of the top business objectives shared by companies of all sizes, industries, and geographies. Its direct correlation to a company's ability to increase profitability has a compounding effect on its importance. One of the most cost-effective ways to drive productivity improvement initiatives is to increase collaboration across the enterprise, both internally among employees as well as between employees, partners, and customers, through the use of a standardized set of tools.

Silos of knowledge and expertise are inherent in every growing and diversified business, and quickly becomes a drag on efficiency and expense. These can be overcome with the introduction of information management tools equipped with built-in or add-on collaboration capabilities. SharePoint is dominating the capture of market share in the information management space, and collaboration-enabling add-ons are sure to follow. This whitepaper investigates some of the critical elements and benefits of instituting effective SharePoint collaboration.

Controlling Costs through Collaboration

The need to control costs organization wide is a key reason to implement collaboration within SharePoint. The economics of supporting document sharing within the enterprise can be prohibitive, especially when supplemental individual licenses, per user, are required to support file format specific programs such as AutoCAD. Additionally, a soft cost that must be considered is the lag in productivity when employees have to switch between the document management portal and these individual applications to view documents. Enabling collaboration in real-time using SharePoint improves the overall speed of an end to end workflow, because all team members have access to necessary documents, including all versions of each document. Emailing document versions back and forth has a number of disadvantages – not only the

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wasted time between replies, but also the possibility that several different versions will be created simultaneously and will have to be merged by hand.

An integrated viewing platform with collaboration capabilities, including annotations, combined with SharePoint's user tracking capabilities, saves time and costs by allowing employees to open any document type in an embedded browser window, apply markup, and save the new version. Employees would no longer need to have client licenses for file format support, or use email to share information. In fact they wouldn't even need to minimize or leave the SharePoint site to get work done.

Collaboration and Innovation

Eric Reis, advisor to venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caulfield & Byers, states that companies who practice "ferocious, customer-centric, rapid iteration", in other words, who demonstrate an ability to drive innovation through collaboration with the 'extended enterprise' (consisting not only of employees, but customers, and partners as well) will realize the return on their investment in the form of market leadership. Standardizing on a common, easily shareable file type – such as PDF – enables an organization to quickly share and extend information, regardless of the original file format in which a document was created. Deploying a SharePoint-integrated viewing platform that enables any file type to be converted to PDF, either on demand or in batch mode, allows internal participants to work seamlessly with their external counterparts to drive product improvements that give the organization a competitive advantage.

Sharing proprietary or non-public information with external sources, in the pursuit of collaborative innovation, is often a proposal that is met with some trepidation. Loss of intellectual property, exposure of confidential strategies to the marketplace, and even lawsuits arising from indiscreet information transfer to third parties are real factors. While information sharing is increasingly a critical factor for realizing competitive advantage, the same data must be reasonably

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protected. A platform that includes user-level and document-level Digital Rights Management (DRM), coupled with the ability to burn-in redactions, thereby preventing an outside user from selecting or otherwise revealing the underlying text, ensures information security when dealing with documents, including sensitive data and/or intellectual property. DRM prevents information from being printed, modified, downloaded, or saved by end users. By adding DRM control in combination with redactions on the document, organizations remain in control of exactly what internal data external participants can see, and most importantly what they can't see.

Optimizing SharePoint Usage

Despite the best laid plans to document and enforce a logical, intuitive structure for an organization's digital information, many SharePoint sites become unwieldy from an end-user perspective; hard to navigate and full of homeless documents that could add incredible value – if only the right people knew where to find them. An integrated viewing platform allows users to preview and select documents to work with, using SharePoint's keyword search to find documents throughout the site. An embedded viewer allows users to open those documents in a web browser window, without leaving the site.

The Future of SharePoint

Imagine a workforce with the ability to collaborate on documents and process complete workflows without ever having to leave their SharePoint site, download specialty software, search tirelessly through email, or compile manual versions of team member markups. It's easy to see why an organization with an end to end document management and collaboration solution in place can spend more time working with their extended enterprise to innovate, rather than having to respond to gaps in their toolbox. Integrating a powerful, fully-featured viewing platform, as described above, with SharePoint takes you one step closer to realizing return – not only on your SharePoint infrastructure investment, but also on your investment in employees, partners, and customers.

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About the Author

Prateek Kathpal is the founder of Adeptol, a software company focused on developing imaging applications, which was acquired by Accusoft in 2011. He is currently responsible for the Viewing Products strategy at Accusoft. Prateek founded Adeptol to create an enterprise-wide viewing platform and associated solutions, to replace traditional thick client products. Prior to founding Adeptol, Prateek held senior positions within the Content Management Division of EMC. Prateek has also worked with EMC Documentum, NEC, Sapient, Cognizant, JPMorgan Chase and other similar organizations. He also founded a SaaS Content Management Venture, which was acquired by a China-based company in 2008. Prateek is an Engineering graduate with an MBA in Marketing.

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