

# Don't say Web 2.0, say Intranet 2.0

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**A White Paper on Social Networking**

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## Don't say Web 2.0, say Intranet 2.0

*How to provide a quick and easy way to deliver the benefits of Web 2.0 without huge up-front investment.*

There is a lot of interest at the moment in Web 2.0, a catch-all term for ways of making websites much more dynamic and socially interactive. What is a pity is that all the jargon about mash-ups and social media might suggest opening up your online presence this way will require lots of investment in arcane or unproven technology. Far from it. You already have 90% of what you need, only you don't call it your social networking site - you call it your intranet.

This document sets out to help senior business managers understand the key benefits that SharePoint and other social tools can bring to become a more efficient and collaborative operation in affordable steps. The material is based on our experience and that of our customers who we have helped in a number of SharePoint projects.

The document offers insight and material covering how established Microsoft SharePoint technology can be used to integrate things like blogs and wikis to create a dynamic intranet to really excite your customers:

- o Understanding the need for a company intranet built on SharePoint technology
- o The benefits of the latest evolution of SharePoint

## Net Gains

"Implementing a portal in organizations can lead to increased productivity, improved work collaboration, knowledge sharing, and maximized investment on expensive back-end packages."

- 'Portal Software Market Opportunities, Strategies, and Forecasts, 2006 to 2012'. Wintergreen Research. September 2006

It's a reality that not all intranets have lived up to earlier expectations, perhaps. You may be in the position of a lot of organisations and have the intranet owned by the IT department, or perhaps Marketing, with little involvement or buy-in from other parts of the business. It might be very static, getting updated with new information as little as once a month. Probably all the good information you have there is not always easy to retrieve. All too often we have seen intranets that started out with a real mission to help staff and customers better communicate get out of date very quickly and end up as glorified company 'news' sites with a telephone directory attached.

To truly engage, your intranet needs to be much more fluid than that – a real community bulletin board and meeting place. This is after all what blogging and a lot of the Web 2.0/new media chat is about, too. People are now using social networking sites such as YouTube, Bebo, Facebook and so on every day - and they may also have

experienced how easy it is to manage and produce their own content also, using blogs and wikis, even if it's just looking up things on Wikipedia.

Any company online site that doesn't keep pace with the demands of users will fail. Organic, flowing and daily dialogue with customers – by which we mean in a two-way, interactive, back and forth fashion - is not just possible, it's beginning to be an expectation. If you are not using your intranet to engage with the people who care about your business, from customer to partner to supplier to staffer, then you are wasting such a site's potential.

Before you rush off and try again, be warned that the intranet is not the place for safe, slick corporate communications. People want to hear what the Managing Director thinks yes, but do they want the PR version or the message that sounds like it's from the heart? That's what will engage people. It may not be as slick as the old version you tried, but it's real - and anything else will push people away, not invite them in.

This kind of dialogue is about building the equivalent of the town square online – a place where people can meet and participate. Companies like Microsoft understand this. Not only have created the engine to make this kind of dialogue possible with the latest revs of SharePoint, but Microsoft has also fully embraced the philosophy of Web 2.0 and the social networking ideal. Look at its own practice: it has encouraged everyone in the organisation to blog, build a community and join the debate. It seems to have worked; Microsoft now has over 4,000 such bloggers communicating away with the outside world, and not always toeing the company line, interestingly.

The benefits of this kind of conversation and engagement can include:

- Faster, more powerful, more relevant discussions lead to higher productivity
- Giving all staff and managers the ability to access the right information, in the right way, helps the employee do a better job, and faster
- The ability to work together better, make effective business decisions and produce results, particularly when multiple employees and/or multiple locations are involved, is a huge bonus
- Reduced costs: minimising travel costs and costs of finding and disseminating information (via things like less email duplication)
- Building richer relationships with new and existing customers can align with the strengthening of partner relationships and improved partner communication
- Access to business intelligence, using data catalogues and the Performance Point Server tool
- You can retain knowledge in a secure place, not just in peoples' heads – see how a wiki can quickly become a tool for storing documentation, etc
- Single point of access to line of business applications from a single location
- Key aid in assisting companies with compliance and regulatory issues

The message is clear: the ideal delivery platform for the benefits of Web 2.0 is an reinvigorated company intranet, jazzed up with new thinking based on the latest in what Microsoft SharePoint technology can deliver.



Because of our background in delivering and supporting SharePoint implementations, our firm, Concentra, is ideally placed to help. Our wealth of experience is based on the

successful implementation of a large number of diverse solutions meeting just such business needs. We always concentrate on business issues – so we will only deliver the functionality you need to solve your business issues. We always avoid talking to customers like you in jargon or by hiding behind complex technical details – they are not relevant to your concerns.

## SharePoint is no rolling stone

On that front, let's talk a bit more about the technology we have been alluding to, SharePoint. To be honest, it's a name that doesn't imply much to non-technical people. We're like that in IT; who'd heard of Arpanet until it morphed into the World Wide Web? Anyway, all that really matters is that SharePoint is a key Microsoft technology and coheres very closely to a lot of major industry trends, such as a shift to much more collaboration-based ways of working. Sometimes this trend is talked about as 'portals,' (a way for lots of information sources and applications to be accessed through one interface, in effect). In 2005 respected analyst group Jupiter Research revealed 64% of companies have deployed enterprise portals for the benefit of their employees, 49% have deployed portals for customers, and 25% to 29% have deployed solutions for their trading partners. Research from Aberdeen Group in August 2006 revealed that companies are increasing their budgets for purchasing collaborative applications such as portals by an average of 35% per year.

SharePoint is a leader in the portal and intranet spaces equally, with fellow IT industry analysts Gartner on record as recommending it as is the intranet solution of choice. Microsoft recently announced that SharePoint Server passed the [US\\$800 million mark for revenue](#), which in effect means that it is the fastest growing server products in the software giant's history, amazing for a product only first launched in 2001. IDC predict that 2008 will be "a breakout year" for Microsoft SharePoint Server 2007.

The latest release of the award winning SharePoint software, MOSS (Microsoft Office SharePoint Server), will only further consolidate that dominance. Microsoft has added a lot of new functionality, including new capability areas such as records management and line of business integration with Business Intelligence products such as Performance Point Server. These products bring improved visibility and help transform business understanding. Enterprise Search is another latest version SharePoint software add on that lets you get into the data and understand what is going on within the business. Another win: better workflow. Microsoft's Form Server makes a business process management approach, based on greatly improved workflow, possible. The latest evolution of SharePoint includes easy to set up templates for you to create and support the creation of user blogs and wikis, along with a lot of options to customise them how you like. It also contributes to design flexibility because of an easy, template-based publishing tool; using this approach you can design your website's appearance in almost limitless ways. This is just the kind of 'kitbag' the intranet developer needs.

Let's spend a short time reviewing the most professional and effective means of upgrading to the MOSS way of doing things and achieving the results you want. A way that works here is to approach the upgrade path by looking at migration as the bigger issue over functionality. Without working on migrating your original site content correctly, your SharePoint solution will not bring you the results you expect. So as experienced implementers of SharePoint Concentra works with you to migrate all the content elements, plus help you to make the most of the new compelling MOSS format.

Our QuickStart project management approach has been foremost in delivering benefits to organisations on an upgrade path: and many leading companies in the sector say they are now reaping the benefits. "We ended up with a methodology that worked for us and not one that was imposed upon us. The flexibility of the approach was a key success factor," says one of our clients, BSI Group Web Manager, Steve Corney, for instance.

## Why SharePoint?

Overall, SharePoint is transforming the way organisations can deliver information, driving management information to individual user desktops – and all of them integrating there with familiar Office tools such as Word and Excel. As customers already own and understand these tools, they've already got the skills to start exploiting them, which brings your integration and deployment overheads radically down.

This is great for your anticipated return on investment before you even get real improvement in business processes. And when you look at business efficiency as a whole, it makes sense to invest in a standard platform, as you can be sure you are investing in tools that you will be able to apply easily to whatever other business challenges you may have.

Research from the Butler Group (2003) has found that through investment in collaboration technology companies typically spend around 35% less on their sales, general and administrative functions than other organisations.

Put all this together and it is clear SharePoint provides businesses with the ability to build a bigger 'community' and improve collaboration both within an organisation and with partners and customers. The technology - as with all Microsoft products - is easy to use, implement and maintain. Using the combined collaboration features, users in your organisation can easily create, manage, and build their own collaborative websites and make them available throughout the team.

Users can, in a controlled environment, then go on to create shared workspaces for events, calendars and documents. They can receive alerts when content is altered and can access the workspace using their normal web browser. Integration with other systems is a key feature of all this and again the good news is by sticking with Microsoft that can easily be arranged.

SharePoint is based on Microsoft's leading edge. Net technology and the widely observed XML standard, for instance, making it integrate seamlessly with not just other Microsoft products but also other line of business applications. This promotes a range of benefits, not least of which is it allows users to update shared documents from within their familiar applications allowing a 'single version of the truth'.

We've talked a lot about intranets so far. What if yours is broken, though, or worse, non-existent? Getting intranets up and running quickly and cheaply is highly desirable. The good news is that SharePoint delivers both intranet and extranet functionality 'out-of-

the-box', speeding up the time to implementation by using user-friendly, flexible and integrated Microsoft technology. For example, SharePoint tightly integrates with the ubiquitous Microsoft Office desktop business suite, providing document, meeting, contact and email management via a Web browser.

Other SharePoint plus-points include:

- Dynamic Web pages can be created on the fly, allowing non-technical users to affect the content of the pages. News items and write-ups, details on and notes from meetings, calendars, discussion forums, surveys, and company data from sales to payroll details can be made available - all based on a rigorous (secured) user access system
- 'Intelligent' components let even non-programmers gather information they care about and customise the appearance of Web pages, as well as personalise them to suit the needs of the organisation, team or even individual
- Similarly, information that may be relevant to users outside your organisation can be produced, managed and made available by non-technical users – with password protection for your peace of mind, again all maintained centrally

## Start planning now

It may make sense now to start asking your suppliers what plans they have to support SharePoint and other social tools.

Why?

- It will make creating intranets faster, more effective and cheaper to maintain
- It will radically change what IT software suppliers can provide
- It will radically alter what IT Services companies like Concentra need to supply you, centring on more integration. We have produced, for instance, a number of software component 'add-ons' that extend the already rich baseline SharePoint functionality
- You will be far more easily able to give the information each type of user needs to do their job well, in a way convenient to them
- You can better leverage one of your companies most valuable assets – data of all types which is currently spread throughout disjointed applications in a range of formats, on a variety of operating systems.

The social networking concept is a fresh and new approach, and may not pan out. But SharePoint and intranets/portals have proven themselves over and over again and it would be a shame to miss out on their benefits. The reality is that an improved intranet will give you benefits now today – even as it helps you get ready for the Web 2.0 world.

Many of the duplication/integration issues associated with legacy applications or integrated systems can disappear as well, while SharePoint provides you with a platform upon which to create high-impact employee, customer, and partner portals that are easy

to use, deliver lower total cost of ownership, are supported by a global community of users, developers, and expert solution providers – and which work!

Social networking and Web 2.0 is still evolving but everyone should start planning now – so as not to miss out on the opportunity. And the best place to start such a journey is by reinvigorating that neglected company asset, the intranet.

## Where to go from here

So what should you look for in SharePoint and intranets/portal provider?

A provider that allows an organisation to move at its own pace and budget is a major advantage. An incremental approach based on clearly realisable short term wins - starting small adding more advanced features as the need is defined and your people ready to progress to the next stage - will help deliver consistent project success.

Talk to us to see how we can help you collaborate better.

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Concentra is an information technology services company specialising in the delivery of Microsoft-based technology solutions. Our consultants design, implement and support a range of Intranet, Extranet and custom-built solutions that help organisations maximise their IT investment. We work with a wide range of companies across many industry verticals.

Clients include UK Sport, Deloitte, Bindman & Partners, American Express, Betfair, Permira, NHS, BSI Group, Aspen Re, National Institute of Health Research, Pret a Manger, Watts & Partners, Westfield and the Carbon Trust.

Our consultants bring unparalleled technology, industry knowledge, and delivery expertise to the table – a powerful combination that has helped us implement comprehensive solutions that have delivered measurable business value for our many clients.