Information **Architected**Inc

IA	Case Study

SharePoint Proves to be Financially Sound Investment

Information Architected SharePoint Case Study

A major United States-based financial services company shares how it leverages SharePoint within IT teams, to promote collaboration and drive down operational costs.

Information Architected, Inc.

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Company Background

The subject of this case study has asked that their identity remain anonymous, which it will. For the purpose of putting this case study in context, it should be appreciated that the company is a US-based financial services and insurance organization, among the largest such organizations in the world, employing several thousand individuals. Annual revenue is in the multi-billion dollar range. They are a full financial services provider and have many distribution partners. The case study is based on an interview with a representative of the Information Services department (IS), directly involved in rolling out collaboration to the organization.

Project Background - SharePoint and a Need to Collaborate

The decision to get involved with SharePoint was strategically made by the enterprise services area within the IS department of this company, as a result of a dedicated focus on enterprise collaboration. With an inclination to believe that collaboration was not only critical to the organization, but also capable of being facilitated through technology, the IS group launched a proof of concept (POC) approach. POCs were developed in several candidate tools, including one from IBM, and Microsoft SharePoint.

The SharePoint POC began in 2005 with SharePoint 2003. This project remained fairly stagnant. While SharePoint was considered a potential candidate for collaboration, the IS group was not impressed with the level of functionality at that time. Interest in the future of SharePoint remained, however, and when SharePoint 2007 was released, the IS team felt SharePoint was ready for production use.

SharePoint was selected as the collaboration platform over other tools, because collaboration, the target of the project, was viewed as integral to user involvement and user content, which is considered part of the desktop environment. The desktop environment was simultaneously viewed as heavily steeped in the Microsoft Office Suite, and thus SharePoint, which integrated better at the desktop with the Microsoft Office Suite had an appeal. IBM products are still very much in use, but IS positions and leverages these as server-based functionality, middleware and background processing. So the decision was made to deliver end user productivity as a tightly integrated desktop, using Microsoft products.

In 2007, a production system, based on MOSS 2007 was launched by the IS department. SharePoint was positioned as a "for IS only" collaboration tool, in an effort to control use and unmanaged proliferation. Some business areas and/or people that worked closely with IS on projects were brought into the SharePoint fold at that time, but it was limited to sites that were owned by IS.   The collaboration sites were predominately new applications within the organization, so there were no content migration issues with legacy applications to consider.

Collaboration Required an Integrated Solution

In taking a critical and strategic view at collaboration, from the start IS believed that SharePoint alone was not enough. In order to justify an investment in SharePoint IS needed to tie it to a broader value proposition, integrating with complementary functionality. The collaboration solution consisted of SharePoint as well as Communicator (to provide instant messaging in a production environment) and Live Meeting (to provide web conferencing).

The collaboration production environment, released in 2007, was executed in two stages. Communicator was bundled with Live Meeting in the initial release, followed up approximately four months later with SharePoint. These integrated three products are the collaboration platform that IS presented to the company.

There's More to Collaboration Than SharePoint

Justification was key to the success (and funding) of SharePoint within the company. The ability to move from POC into production was dependent upon a cost-justification. That justification came in the form of a reduction in the annual operating budget. The collaboration team provided dollar savings based on an underlying assumption that the IS team would be more productive using collaboration technologies instead of doing things "the old-fashioned way."

An ROI model was developed and executed against a number of employees within IS, showing the time that could be saved per person and how that translated into dollars. The assumption made was that each person would achieve a certain higher level of productivity through facilitated collaboration, which was translated into reductions in the operating budget. That justification was not realized based purely on SharePoint, but again, on the entire collaboration platform (SharePoint, Live Meeting and Communicator).

KISS Principle Fundamental to SharePoint Strategy

The company understood that a SharePoint implementation could grow well beyond "simple collaboration", the target for the deployment, very quickly and wanted very much to avoid that. Therefore, from the start, IS kept tight reins on the deployment and proliferation of SharePoint within the company, both in terms of the business applications and user communities it is applied to. Similarly, the deployment of SharePoint is kept relatively straightforward. Little to no integration or customization of SharePoint is provided.

As part of their SharePoint strategy development, the company looked at the approach taken by other SharePoint user organizations that focused on very specific aspects of SharePoint (e.g., the document library, wikis, blogs or discussion threads), and then customized these to the nth degree for their respective organization. These approaches did not appeal to the company, who fundamentally wished to keep the SharePoint implementation simple, controlled and focused on basic collaboration. So, rather than selecting specific SharePoint features and maximizing their "attractiveness" through customization and integration, they deployed all the available SharePoint features all at once, but in the most generic, or "out-of-the-box" manner. Again, a major aspect of the strategy was to provide no customization or integration. The company saw in SharePoint a general approach to collaboration and did not want to further complicate (and drive up cost) the proposition beyond that.

In each instance, SharePoint is used to specifically and exclusively focus on collaboration functionality. Site owners are allowed to use simple SharePoint configuration tools, but IS will not provide any customization, integration or custom code development within SharePoint. The company's representative stated, "At this point, out-of-the-box functionality by itself is a lot to take on and a lot of benefit can be realized from that. Part of the strategy was to not over-invest too soon in SharePoint." Where gaps in functionality and interfaces are perceived, rather than build them, the company believes it is prudent to wait for Microsoft to (eventually) release them as part of SharePoint. The company is aware that Microsoft is investing "a ton of money" in SharePoint and with Office 14 coming out later this year or 2010, they believe that "out-of-the-box" functionality will be significantly enhanced. Therefore they think it wise and fiscally responsible to not over customize the product today, when it is likely that Microsoft will provide the desired enhanced capabilities and functionality soon enough.

Governance Seen as Fundamental to Success With SharePoint

As previously mentioned, by strategic design, IS does not provide SharePoint customization or integration services. They do however provide guidance and governance on SharePoint usage, and have done so from the start. In keeping with the full release of "out-of-the-box" SharePoint approach, all of the functionality and capabilities of SharePoint were made available from day 1, but, in order to provide some control, IS felt an appropriate amount of governance, training and support were necessary.

From a technical standpoint IS provides templates for the various team sites. The three primary types supported are project teams, support teams and knowledge teams. Each of these team types starts with a template created by IS that include any number of the approximately 30 web parts offered within SharePoint "out-of-the-box". This the starting point for each new site.

Going beyond the simple technology framework provided, IS provides recommended practices. To a certain degree this level of governance-based control was imposed because the company is most concerned with compliance issues. As a financial services company, the company is highly regulated. Many employees are registered or associated with broker dealers, individuals for whom electronic communication is highly regulated. Some of the web parts provided within SharePoint provide for electronic communication. Based on corporate culture, IS took a very conservative approach to this functionality within SharePoint. Initially, an inability to comprehensively and centrally administer security led to a policy wherein any potential user that could remotely violate corporate communication protocol was simply not given access to SharePoint.

It was not security, per se, but compliance that was a concern, almost an inhibitor to adoption. Specifically, as the company allows business people to collaborate with IS within the SharePoint sites, there concern over an inability to dynamically regulate what these business users were contributing or communicating. The business users are registered users. How was the site going to provide value if the necessary business participants were locked out of the sites because of potential compliance risks, when IS needed them to be involved? A cultural shift was required.

As IS personnel, business management and users alike became more experienced with SharePoint, the "all or nothing" approach to compliance was eased. The onus

regarding compliance has been shifted to the registered users. Users are permitted access to the various SharePoint sites, but are expected to know what they should and should not do. All users permitted into a site have read-only access, all users can contribute to the document library sites. But not all users *should* (i.e., technically they can), contribute to discussion threads, blogs, surveys or whatever else is considered electronic communication. In the riskiest areas, IS inserts a disclaimer on the site. But, in the interest of supporting and fostering collaboration, IS does not totally lock out the business user from SharePoint.

IS convinced management that access had to be provided, and that risk could be lowered by providing some guidance on proper conduct and usage. Wherever an early adopter was ready to champion adoption of the SharePoint collaboration capabilities within their team and with other teams, IS realized they had to provide "guided" free range, rather than rein in and harness what couldn't be done with SharePoint.

Find Early Adopters and Let Them Blaze the Trail

Thus, from a technology deployment perspective the project was relatively straightforward. Simply put, IS made SharePoint available and allowed early adopters to run with it, to discover the appropriate uses and applications through hands-on use.

For the company, the challenge associated with SharePoint was not one of technology adoption, but one of behavior modification. Users needed to be convinced to change work habits and approaches to collaboration. Company users grew up on the LAN and "emailing stuff around." The collaboration and file sharing enabled through SharePoint was a bit foreign to company users initially.

Rather than building and executing an elaborate training and marketing program, IS allowed early adopters within the company to "get it" on their own. These early adopters were provided some general online training materials. As a result of this minimal education and exposure, they understood the capabilities and made changes to their existing processes and mindsets in order to leverage the capabilities of SharePoint. These early adopters represent approximately 20% of the total population.

Getting the early and late majority user types to embrace SharePoint, approximately 60% of the overall company users, took greater effort. While these potential users could see the value proposition, as illustrated by the early adopters, more effort was necessary to get them to start using the tool. They required more hand-holding and encouragement. So, the company's IS group developed and provided online training

and in-person training to get potential users familiar with and aware of how to use SharePoint. Additionally, a help-desk was created that provides SharePoint/collaboration customer support. Development of the training was a major component of the IS effort behind SharePoint, because Microsoft didn't provide much online training. IS feels that Microsoft has significantly increased its training products since then, and are now starting to phase out their own developed training as they bring in the training made available from Microsoft. Additionally, the calls received by the help desk are monitored, and as a result the online training materials and the help-desk training are updated on a regular basis.

Another critical component of the company's behavior modification strategy was the establishment of Online Collaboration Coordinators for every "team." Each Online Collaboration Coordinator is a resource that team members can contact with questions. They act as a "personal" front line level of support, functioning as the expert in the area, and either provide the answer directly or point the user to where that information is online.

More importantly, no site can be created without designation of an Online Collaboration Coordinator. The Online Collaboration Coordinators are initially given the rights to create the appropriate site for a given team, but they subsequently can either remain as the site owner themselves and/or delegate people on that team to be site-owners.

The Online Collaboration Coordinator is provided an appropriate template that they are allowed to configure to meet their team's specific needs, add appropriate contributors (writers) to the site, and then, by default, everybody in the department is given visitor permissions to the site. The Online Collaboration Coordinator is responsible for establishing any security controls necessary within each site. IS tried to simplify the standard approach to security within a site, and provide guidance on how and when the standard approach needs to be customized.

There are usability issues with security and permissioning within SharePoint. For that reason Online Collaboration Coordinators are provided additional training. IS developed and customized online training around the security challenge and continues to provide extensive in-person training on this aspect of SharePoint. In spite of that, IS and the Online Collaboration Coordinators think administering security within a site is still challenging, both from a governance policy and a technical perspective. IS stated

that security within SharePoint, "…is hard, harder than it ought to be, and hopefully with Office 14 it will become better."

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The IS department continues to control the use and management of SharePoint by limiting usage to IS applications and teams. In 2009, some piloting in business areas beyond IS is being entertained, but only for "business applications" that have a closely demonstrated relationship with IS.

IS is also experimenting beyond collaboration capabilities. It has begun exploring the portal capabilities of SharePoint. Similar to their approach with collaboration, IS has begun exploration with a POC. They are still at the Enterprise Venture Funding stage of SharePoint for portals. At the time of this interview, there were no SharePoint portals in production.

Long Term Strategy Tied to Faith in Microsoft's Commitment to SharePoint

As a result of the "no customization and integration strategy", the company's early adopters are facing some serious limitations within the SharePoint sites. IS realizes that the company is on the early part of the adoption curve in fully leveraging SharePoint. Nonetheless, adoption is growing as users realize there is much more they can get out off SharePoint, as is. While there is some expressed hope that eventually IS will entertain more customization and integration, IS continues to believe it is prudent to wait and see what Microsoft rolls out in future releases of SharePoint, with much anticipation over the Office 14 release. IS stated, "Microsoft has put a billion dollars into their R&D and you've got to believe that there are some things that they are building that we won't have to. So we have chosen to wait and see for the time being."

IS also realizes that by not providing any integration services, they are creating a series of SharePoint "islands." They are expecting these to grow into "continents" over time, by continuing to focus on SharePoint as the platform for collaboration within the company, placing all future investments exclusively on this platform. They foresee a need to integrate other tools in time, for example, IBM Content Manager. They will develop a governance strategy around these key integration points, but for now there is much learning to be done without incurring the burden of integration.

In the interim, several work-arounds and siloed solutions have been put in place, out of necessity. Today, SharePoint is primarily used for the development of content that is actively updated or referenced by company knowledge workers. But, because some

of this content is also critical business record, as appropriate, users are "required" to publish copies of content to other repositories. For example, a certain percentage of the SharePoint content has been manually copied into various IBM/Lotus Domino repositories.

IS monitors and tracks such needs, but for now is keeping with the "no integration or customization strategy", and relies on corporate governance and "good citizenship" to remain compliant. As previously mentioned, there is a high-degree of dependency and hope riding on Microsoft maturing SharePoint quickly and obsolescing the need for IS to build customized solutions.

 "As far as SharePoint goes, we are in, we are all in. It's just a matter of how much investment we can make at one time. How much behavior change can we expect to take place over time." IS foresees SharePoint someday replacing the LAN, Domino, and the corporate Intranet, but this is a long-term strategy.

Advice and Lessons Learned

The company IS offers the following advice to organizations that are considering, or just beginning to embark on a SharePoint initiative.

1. If you haven't looked at SharePoint recently – look again. The tool has been improved greatly and has a lot more capability and improved usability. Do not base decisions and designs on anything but an up-to-date assessment of SharePoint, in detail.
2. Plan, plan and then plan again. Then be sure to monitor your progress. Overall there were no unexpected issues with SharePoint in the company. IS credits that to the knowledge and experience gained in doing a POC, as well as engaging appropriate consultants to assist in making sure that the solution was going to be scalable. Consultants were used to assess and manage basic design criteria (e.g., the overall taxonomy of the sites) and the change management issues. IS cautions that, overall, the technical side of the solution is the easier part of the project. The technology is complicated enough to warrant obtaining internal and external expertise, but finding and leveraging that expertise was easier than getting expertise to help with the non-technical issues, the behavior change component of the project. IS found this to be much more challenging.
   - Once up and running, IS established formal and regular monitoring of the system, both technically and from a user perspective. The technical and behavioral

strategies are adjusted on a regular basis. SharePoint should be viewed as an ever growing collaboration environment, and not a static solution.

3. Approach collaboration and adoption of SharePoint as a behavior change initiative, not a technology initiative. (This advice is somewhat redundant to the advice offered in the preceding bullet, but IS stressed that behavioral change is so important, it really needs to be specifically called out.)

   • Appreciate and put in place all the training and communication (top-down and bottom-up) needed to get early adopters up and running ASAP. Early adopters "get it" when you provide "general training." With that behind you, you have to increase the level of change management provided. To get the main-streamers on board, more specific training, coaching and visioning needs to be developed and provided. Specific work scenarios need to be developed to illustrate for the mainstream adopters what their specific work processes would look like within the SharePoint environment. That kind of investment in time and money is necessary in order for most professionals to "get it."

   • Provide training and support for each site with a dedicated Online Collaboration Coordinator and be sure to develop governance, guidelines and templates to facilitate adoption and drive compliance.

4. Approach the project top-down and bottom-up simultaneously. Do a justification and use it to garner high-level sponsorship for the initiative. Simultaneously support and facilitate user adoption.

5. Recognize that you are embarking on a very lengthy project. It doesn't stop when you implement the tool. That's only the beginning. Be sure to keep this in mind when developing your business case. The software and hardware investment is overall a small percentage of the total cost of successful adoption of SharePoint.

The initial budget for this project was $1.2 million, for all three technologies (SharePoint, Live Meeting and Connector). But, the cost of the project continues to increase with continuing investments made to raise adoption levels and assisting users with maximizing the benefits realized.

Closing Thought - Measuring Success

The company has 100% of the targeted community using SharePoint now. The early adopters are leading the charge. The mainstream adopters are coming along and the laggards are being pulled along, but everybody is using SharePoint for something. IS suspects that some users do not realize they are using SharePoint when they are

saving Word files, or following links in an e-mail with attachments, but they are. Among the more aggressive users, there are varying degrees of leveraging workflows, wikis, blogs and discussion threads.

IS does not, however, measure its SharePoint success based on the number of users, or the uptake of specific functionality. The company measures its success with SharePoint based on levels of activity per user, not number of users. So if the average user is accessing SharePoint once a month, this is not considered success. If each user is accessing SharePoint at least 15 times a month that gives the company a much better indication of success. Similarly, the number of sites is not important, but rather the number of times the sites are accessed by each person.

Overall, the SharePoint project is deemed a success. Summing up their experience, the IS representative stated, "SharePoint is our future. We are off to a great start, but just wait until the business is fully engaged in collaboration and we have portal websites up and running."

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Information Architected develops customized strategies for SharePoint implementations and specifically provide assistance in conducting needs assessments, change management planning, and constructing the information architecture that properly supports your SharePoint goals and objectives.

Though no two SharePoint implementations will be exactly the same, there are critical best practices to implementation that should be followed.

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... to discuss your specific needs and what we can do to streamline your business' use of SharePoint.

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