

Bits & Bytes

Insider Tips On How To Use Technology To Make Your Business Run Faster, Easier, And More Profitably



“As a business owner , I know you don’t have time to waste on technical and operational issues. That’s where we shine! Call us and put an end to your IT problems forever.”

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How SharePoint Can Skyrocket Your Company’s Productivity Without Costing You a Bundle



Many of you have heard of SharePoint and for those of you who have a Windows server, you have access to a free version of the software. What you probably don’t know is that with a minimum upfront investment to set up and program some basic features, what a power tool it can be in your business by helping your staff get better organized, reduced clutter and skyrocket productivity - all while improving security.

What is SharePoint?

SharePoint is a collaboration tool from Microsoft that provides essentially a database “sandbox” that is a rapid deployment environment where a developer can very quickly create an intranet site around common themes or topics relevant to your business. The power of this database driven tool is its ability to store, sort, search and filter your company information and documents by customizable tags (or labels / categories).

Everything you put on SharePoint is accessible through your internet browser whether inside the corporate network or securely from an external location. Accessing SharePoint remotely can be configured to not require a VPN connection since it uses the internet. Rest assured, security features are such that in order to access the site, you are asked for network username and password over a secure https connection similar to what banks and shopping carts use on the internet .

While any business can greatly benefit from SharePoint, if your employees access multiple documents or your business has road warriors or remote offices, then it’s particularly important for you to read on.

3 Most Common Uses For SharePoint

To best illustrate some of the applications of SharePoint, I’ll talk about 3 common uses of it by businesses:

- I. **Document Management:** This is one of the most powerful features of SharePoint. Most businesses have a shared drive on the network where they store their most commonly needed documents (i.e. templates, contracts, procedure manuals, etc.). Unless your filing and naming conventions are meticulous and consistent, you’ve no doubt experienced the aggravation of trying to find documents, the version you need, or the frustration of learning someone overwrote the document.

An alternative to the risk and annoyance of storing documents on a network drive, is storing them on SharePoint, which offers the following enhanced capabilities:

A) Access Security: As the SharePoint site leverages your network username and password, you can easily assign permissions through groups to sections within SharePoint so that staff have access to only what they need. All changes made within the sites record the username, date and time, so an audit trail is created.

Shiny New Gadget of the Month:

HP e-Print

The new HP ePrint lets you print documents and images from virtually any PC or phone simply by e-mailing them to your printer. If you can send an e-mail, you can use ePrint. Here's how it works:

First, you assign an email address to your printer and connect it to the Internet through either a wireless or wired connection. To print something, simply send an email containing your document to your printer's address – it's that simple! You can print images, Microsoft Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, PowerPoint presentations, PDFs, and photos. You can view and manage print jobs sent to your printer using your printer Job History that is available on HP's ePrint-Center.

One downside is that some documents printed with ePrint may appear different from the original in style, formatting and text flow. For documents that need to be printed with a higher quality (such as legal documents), you might want to go the traditional way of printing directly from your PC. The HP ePrint service is available free of charge with your HP ePrint-enabled printer and does not require any special software or smart phone apps to work.

B) Document Lifecycle Management: SharePoint contains features that can easily manage the evolution of a document from its creation to its final form and eventual retirement. This allows you to easily see all the changes made to a document, when and by whom, roll back a change, and quickly clean up outdated documents.

C) Approval of content and content changes: Approval cycles can be set up such that only selected individuals can change, update and approve content and make the document final.

D) Versioning: You can easily see who made changes, what changes and when. You can also roll back a change such that if you don't like a version, you can roll back to a previous one, all without involving the IT department. A real life saver of this feature is that it makes it virtually impossible to lose changes anyone made because someone overwrote the document.

E) Archiving: This is used for documents that are no longer required in daily production (so as to reduce clutter in SharePoint), but are still accessible by going to a particular view that shows only archived documents. You can flag a document to be archived on a particular date or you can manually do so.

F) Portability: SharePoint can be made available from anywhere through an internet browser. It can also be made available while you are off-line (not connected to the internet) by leveraging features in Outlook 2010 and SharePoint Workspace (a new separate SharePoint application). Sites can be optimized so you can access them from your mobile device.

G) Categorization / Labelling: If you've ever been frustrated trying to find a document on your file server, this is the solution for you. With multiple ways to describe a document (categories, summaries, keywords) you can categorize documents so that it works best for your particular business so that you can browse by category, sub & sub-sub categories, dates created, username etc., making it quick and easy to locate what you need.

- 2. Team / Project Rooms:** If you have teams in your business that need to collaborate around a common theme, project or business function, Project Rooms provide a platform for employees to store documents, have discussion forums, shared calendars for important dates, web links and anything else that all members of a team need to see. This feature is particularly useful if a team crosses different geographical boundaries and time zones. These rooms also substantially eliminate the clutter, disorganization and confusion caused by e-mail chains during collaboration. These rooms are perfect for new product launches, RFP's, sales and management teams.
- 3. Discussion / Blog Environment:** Keep your staff up to date in one central location with news of sales victories, new product / service launches, policy changes, etc. or anything you need to communicate to your entire company.

Across all of the above functions, alerting can be set up such that users can subscribe to get e-mail alerts when content changes occur in areas relevant to their job function.

How To Get Started

While the applications of SharePoint are virtually limitless, the above gives an overview of general ways it can be used to improve collaboration and gain efficiencies within most businesses.

Based on our experience with clients, deploying the document management functions alone, is a great place to start. Our clients who have used it absolutely love the ways it's made their jobs easier, freed up time, reduced clutter, and allowed others in the company to easily and quickly access data on their own, without relying on admin staff to find what they need.

Within 1 ½ to 2 days of effort for a TAG technician, we can get the software installed, a document management site up ready to receive your data, and train core users.

If you're interested in learning in finer detail how SharePoint can help your business, give Joe Stoll a call at (416) 489-6312 x 204 or e-mail JStoll@TechnicalActionGroup.com.

February is National “Clean Up Your Computer” Month (Something You’ll Rush To Do Once You Read This Survey That Reveals Just How Dirty Your Keyboard Is!)



Since there’s a holiday or month for just about every cause imaginable, it should come as no surprise that cleaning your PC now has its own official month, awarded by none other than “The Vinegar Institute.” But before you dismiss this one, consider this little factoid: ABC news reported that a study in England revealed that the average office keyboard had bacteria and germ levels up to five times higher than those commonly found on a toilet seat. The study, headed up by Dr. James Francis, a British microbiologist, took culture samples from 33 office keyboards in London, and compared these samples to swabs taken from toilet seats in the same office buildings, containing nasty germs such as e-coli and staph bacteria. Kinda gives new meaning to the term, “computer virus!” So how do you not only disinfect your keyboard but also get those annoying smudges and fingerprints off your monitor?

Here are a few tips:

1. **Turn off the monitor.** It’s not required, but it makes smudges and smears easier to see.
2. **Use compressed air to get rid of light dust buildup in your keyboard and screen.** Never use a dish rag or paper towel to clean your monitor since they can scratch the screen; and you never want to use water on your keyboard!
3. **Don’t use products with ethyl alcohol or ammonia based products to clean your monitor.** Products like Windex can yellow flat-screen or laptop monitors. Instead, use a cleaning product designed for monitors and use a lint-free cloth designed for the job. Note: Each monitor manufacturer has its own special instructions for cleaning so make sure you read what those are before attempting to clean up anything.
4. **Lightly moisten your cloth with rubbing alcohol or cleaning solution to wipe off your mouse or keyboard areas.** Never apply the liquid directly to the screen, keyboard or other electronic parts.
5. **A Q-tip dipped in alcohol will quickly clean your keyboard.** Just make sure you don’t drip

Why Your “Not-To-Do-List” Is Just As Important As Your “To-Do” List

One of the New Year’s resolutions I often have is to get more organized and better manage my time. After all, who doesn’t want to get more done? But a big mistake many people make is thinking ONLY in terms of “more” when it comes to getting things done. Why is this a mistake? Because chances are your plate is already full of to-do items; if you want to accomplish MORE, you’ll have to actually start thinking about what you are going to STOP doing in order to fit in the more important tasks that move you closer to your goals.

As we all know, only about 20% of the things you do deliver 80% of the results you want to achieve. Therefore, in order to “get more done,” you have to clearly identify what that 20% is and focus on doing more of those activities, and delegating or ignoring the 80% of time-wasting “stuff” we all get caught up in doing. What are some big time wasters?

- Not having a plan for your day and reacting to whatever shows up.
- Constant texting or online surfing. For many, this is a huge addiction and distraction that can waste HOURS.
- Checking e-mail every 5 minutes.

Tools to Drive Productivity Using Your Smartphone

Entrepreneur Magazine recently published their top 10 list of the best apps for iPhone, BlackBerry, Palm webOS, Windows Mobile and Android that help boost productivity in business. I’ve listed 2 of them here. Check back next month for more!

App: Scan2PDF Mobile
Company: Burrotech Ltd.

Why It Rocks: We’re betting you don’t carry a document scanner everywhere you go. We’re also betting there are times you need to scan a document on the fly. Thankfully there’s Scan2PDF Mobile, which uses your mobile phone to scan documents using the camera and convert them to PDF files, which can be emailed.

Available On: Android, iPhone and Windows Mobile. A BlackBerry version is in development

Price: \$6.15 on the Android Marketplace and \$6.99 in the iTunes App Store; a lite version is free.

App: Quickoffice Connect Mobile Suite

Company: Quickoffice Inc.

Why It Rocks: An internet-based service that offers mobile access to the entire Microsoft Office productivity suite, Quickoffice Connect Mobile Suite enables users to create, open, edit and share documents and spreadsheets on the go.

Available On: Android and iPhone

Price: \$9.99

Thanks for the Kind Words...

“Mike: I just wanted to drop you a note to say thanks for all the hard work this week. With TAG at our side there is nothing that cannot be accomplished.

You were more than professional and your ability to adapt to our demanding schedules and customer commitments was definitely a step beyond the call of duty. I have never met a vendor that is more accommodating than yourself and TAG.

When I called, you immediately recognized the seriousness of the issue and dealt with it accordingly. Our business depends upon Vendors and support that you and TAG offer.

I would not hesitate to recommend TAG to anyone that is looking for an I.T. solution.

Again- Hat's off to you Mike- A full server swap with no noticeable downtime. Keep up the good work!”

Jay Tetley
Stateside Consulting

Please Welcome TAG’s New Client!

NEW HAVEN LEARNING CENTRE
www.newhavencentre.com

New Haven, founded in 1998, is a charitable, non-profit organization committed to being a Centre of Excellence in the treatment and education of children with autism. The Centre's efforts are directed toward improving the education and quality of lives of its students. New Haven Centre’s mission is to contribute to the development of Canadian expertise in Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) intervention by raising awareness and providing training and education to parents, professionals and the community.

New Haven contacted TAG looking for a computer support provider who could be more strategic in aligning New Haven’s IT with their changing business requirements while also modernizing their operations.

TAG undertook a detailed network review and made various recommendations that would provide New Haven with a platform that would improve collaboration within the organization through centralization of e-mail and implementation of Sharepoint to be used as a platform to share information internally and to their external advisory board. As part of a future phase, TAG will be helping New Haven map out their use of technology to support their launch of a new charitable foundation, as well as eventual plans to expand its organization over multiple locations.

New Haven is currently in the process of implementing several of our recommendations as well as its backup and disaster recovery service which would get New Haven up and running within 3 hours or better in the event of a disaster with their server.

Through TAG’s Essential Care Plan, New Haven’s entire network is being monitored 24/7 so potential issues can be addressed before they become downtime and preventative maintenance activities are performed on a regular basis to maximize the health and longevity of its valuable hardware investments.

Would You Like a \$25 iTunes Card?

Congratulations to David Hwang of Contingent Workforce Solutions being the first to correctly answer January’s Trivia Challenge “What is the name of the main newspaper for wizards in Harry Potter’s world?” and winning a \$25 Cineplex card!

The correct answer was c) Daily Prophet

Be the first to submit the correct answer to this month’s trivia question and you’ll receive a \$25 iTunes gift card!

In the novel Moby Dick, in which American port is the whaling ship Pequod based?

a-Nantucket, b-Cooperstown, c-Mystic, d-Boston

Send Your Answer Today to:
SStoll@TechnicalActionGroup.com
Type: ‘February Trivia Question’ in the Subject line.