

Microsoft SharePoint 2007 (aka MOSS07)

Hazel Edmunds, Adset

Should you or shouldn't you? That is the question. Actually the title of the workshop led by Martin White of Intranet Focus Ltd on 21 May was the more prosaic (should I say business-like?) "SharePoint for Intranets and Projects". I went along on behalf of a small bookkeeping company for whom I act as office and information manager (part-time diversification) because in setting up a remote desktop facility for the company ABUK had access to MOSS07 with no instructions as to how to use it or what it could/could not do for us. Martin started the day-long session by finding out why we were all there and it was interesting to note that some information managers had had MOSS07 thrust upon them by the IT department or senior management, while a couple of people **were** the IT department and were resisting the information team's insistence that MOSS07 was the panacea for all ills.

So, which is it? Is it the Holy Grail or a black hole into which "stuff" falls never to be seen again? Probably somewhere in between, but as with anything new (or fairly so), it pays to analyse what this "thing" can do and what is, perhaps, best done outside MOSS07.

Making use of a platform on which your intranet is based does not absolve you from ensuring that the basic IM questions are answered:

- How can I find the information I need to make a decision?
- When I find it how do I know I can trust it?
- How can I make others aware of the information I have created?

Technology, no matter how advanced, cannot provide the answers nor can technology help you with the governance of the information held within a system – and, as we were to find out later in the day, governance is a real headache, as end-users have autonomy over their own work areas, which are called "My Site".

MOSS07 is an infrastructure that seeks to move away from the portal concept of SharePoint Portal Server 2003 towards an integrated information management platform. However, this platform may also be seen as a product (use it out of the box, as is) or as a development environment (do lots of interesting things to it).

I really liked the analogy that Martin used of MOSS07 being like a box of Lego bricks that arrives without any instructions. Yes, you can build anything you want, but to achieve the

Galaxy Explorer you need parts that aren't in the box, and some clear instructions. SharePoint has lots of instructions but not necessarily for building the Galaxy Explorer. And to understand the instructions, you will need to learn a new language. What is meant by such things as farms, hives, lists (which are tables), templates (which are **not** style sheets) etc? Whilst the Microsoft website has good definitions of these things, and lots of others, you do need to be aware that not everything is what your present vocabulary would lead you to believe. So, what does MOSS07 seek to do/be?

There are six pillars or elements to it:

- Content management
 - Web content management
 - Enterprise content management
- Portal
- Search
- Business Processes
- Business Intelligence

This list was on slide 34 of 93 – not that I am complaining about the number of slides, all of which were useful and fitted well into the overall programme for the day, but to give you an indication of the near impossibility of the task set me, your newest or nearly newest member! “Would you do a write-up of today?” asked Christine on the day. “Yes,” said I blithely. Regrets? No, not now I've finally got around to putting fingers to keyboard, although making a start was hard. Style, length and coverage all seemed to be at my discretion. It took me a while to realise that to cover everything was impossible, without any knowledge of the readership I can't adapt my own somewhat informal style, and as for length I could talk for England but not necessarily to any purpose! Back to the detail of SharePoint.

Martin was being as impartial as possible in his presentation. There are, as he said, some things that MOSS07 does very well. Whether these are worth what they will cost for MOSS07, which is **not** free, and for the disruption to an organisation's present system, which can be extensive, is something each individual organisation has to decide. Let me say, however, that the notes I made against the detail of “Web content management” are, bad, yeuk, dreadful, naff and double naff – that's for five items. The enterprise content management system makes it easy to manage Word/Office documents although there are some idiosyncrasies, such as being restricted to checking-out complete documents.

For search I have written one word “appalling”. In mitigation it may be that the SharePoint 2010 will integrate FAST Search (which Microsoft bought in 2007) but for now “the embedded search is significantly lower in features than almost any commercial product”.

You will, no doubt, be able to see the slides of whole presentation for yourself and I do not want to bore you. Suffice it to say, as Martin did, “Whatever SharePoint is, ‘best of breed’ it is not. None of the applications offer any benefits over other products on an individual comparison basis.”

As a non-attendee at the event you will find the SharePoint for Intranets and Projects slides very useful. Each area (intranets, projects and Web 2.0) provides a list of benefits and issues. Follow that by noting the “ensure you understand MOSS07” remembering that events organised by Microsoft Partners are free because they’re sales pitches (think time-share).

In conclusion, the good points:

- A well-integrated suite of applications that are an excellent solution for departments and smaller organisations
- Good support from Microsoft and from a wide range of channel partners
- All the core elements are “good enough” but none are leading edge in terms of features
- Uses standard Microsoft development environment

On the other hand:

- Poorly documented roadmap, especially on search
- Poor conformance to accessibility – very important in Europe
- None of the individual modules are “best of breed”
- Rarely, if ever, is a formal Requirements proposal developed
- Highly dependent on the Microsoft ecosystem
- In 2010 everything changes – Windows 7, Office 14, IE8, FAST Search integration ...

And, on a personal note, I will **not** be recommending adoption of MOSS07 but you may have no choice. This is definitely the place to find out about the issues.