

Information Management

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SharePoint – endless career opportunities!

In total there are now more than 125 million SharePoint seat licences sold to more than 65,000 enterprise customers, though only around 50% are SharePoint 2010 licences. When I talk to information professionals about SharePoint they almost immediately start to talk in cataclysmic terms about their career futures now that IT have taken over. The reality is that no IT platform needs the support of good information professionals more than SharePoint; indeed without our help the implementation is going to be a disaster. Let me explain why.

Information life-cycle policies

SharePoint is an information management platform, not a product nor an application. Although there is much talk about using SharePoint out-of-the-box, that's like buying an Aston Martin and using it just for going to your local Tesco. Almost certainly SharePoint will be either competing with or complementing existing applications, and employees will soon start to ask when they should be using SharePoint rather than

one of the other applications the organisation has already implemented. This is the moment to suggest that now is an excellent time for the organisation to set out an information life-cycle policy. Every consultant has their own set of steps, and mine are:

- Create
- Store
- Discover
- Use
- Share
- Review
- Record
- Dispose

SharePoint can support all of these elements (some better than others!) but if there are no overall policies then there will be many confused employees. Just to take 'Create', many organisations fail to appreciate how much functionality is lost when using Office 2003 or Office 2007.

Metadata

All of the above life-cycle steps depend on high-quality metadata. The problem with SharePoint 2007 was that there was no easy way for the metadata schemes for each Site Collection to be shared with other Site Collections. The Managed Metadata functionality in SharePoint 2010 makes it possible to do so, but there are many different ways in which metadata tags can be applied and used. As information professionals we should be very familiar with the benefits and challenges of maintaining metadata schemes and be offering our skills to IT managers who are very unlikely to understand the absolute necessity of developing metadata standards.

Discovery

One of the weaknesses of SharePoint 2010 if your organisation is using a Standard Client Access License (CAL) is that Search Server for SharePoint 2010 is a fairly basic search application. To get a decent search application your organisation will need to invest in FAST Search Server for SharePoint 2010, which is an expensive upgrade given that most organisations do not need the other bells and whistles that come with the Enterprise CAL. That's not the only discovery problem. If your organisation already has a search application, even if bundled into a document or records management application, then what is going to be the relationship between all the various search implementations. Microsoft will tell you that SharePoint 2010 can provide federated search across multiple applications - technically it can but do ask to see it in action at another organisation first. Again IT managers are unlikely to

understand the complexities of search but as information professionals we certainly should be able to make a substantial contribution.

A little learning goes a long way

SharePoint has a collection of terms which are unique to the platform, and which need to be fully understood by the IT/development and business teams. A list of some of these is given in the table below.

Content Type	Masterpage
Item	Managed Metadata
Libraries	Minor Version
List Template	Site
Lists	Site Collection
Lookup Column	Site Column
Major Version	Site Content Type
Managed Term	Site Templates

Many are common to other web/content management applications, such as "Site", but mean something different when used in SharePoint. Without a good common understanding between IT/development and business, there are very significant risks that what will be delivered is not what was expected. Others are unique to SharePoint, such as the differences between a "Major Version" and a "Minor Version" of a document.

I cannot stress highly enough the importance of understanding exactly what each of these means, and what the implications are. If your organisation is using SharePoint and you cannot write at least 100 words on each of these terms then you are missing a major opportunity to make a significant contribution to the quality of the implementation. It is wise not to rely on books published by Microsoft, or with Microsoft support, as they tend to gloss over what works and what doesn't work! A good place to start is the wealth of resources created by Richard Harbridge at <http://www.rharbridge.com/> and keep a close eye on <https://www.nothingbutsharepoint.com/Pages/default.aspx>.

A glass half-full

SharePoint offers considerable opportunities to information professionals to show their skills, and become core members of development teams. It is not going to go away and it is unlikely that any other IT company is going to come up with an application to supersede it. Like DOS, it may not be perfect, but it is now ubiquitous. I would encourage all UKeiG members to invest a little time in understanding the benefits and challenges of SharePoint. Even if your current organisation does not yet have SharePoint implemented my guess is that a) inside two years it will have and b) if you move to a new job it may already be there.

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