
SharePoint Product Comparison

Whitepaper

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 About BMN

BMN are SharePoint and .NET experts, delivering software development and consulting services to multinational organisations and high performance mid market firms. The company, as a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, designs and builds business information systems to the highest quality standards to support interaction with customers or to facilitate internal management.

BMN has a distinguished, successful track record of providing graphically rich web applications developed on Microsoft technology platforms. Our business model is based upon being a responsive and flexible organisation.

Our client list includes global energy companies, government departments, insurance firms and a range of small and medium sized organisations. For more information, please visit www.bmn.ltd.uk or contact Glenn or Andrew as below:

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1.2 Whitepaper Synopsis

BMN have produced the following whitepaper to help provide some insight into the make-up of the various SharePoint related products that Microsoft offer.

The purpose of this document is therefore to help organisations better understand what aspects of SharePoint may be made available to them as part of the wider deployment of SharePoint across their business.

2 Introduction to SharePoint

2.1 Overview

Microsoft SharePoint is a combination of products and technologies designed to enable increase of business process efficiency and team productivity through a robust storage and collaboration infrastructure. It is designed to become the foundation platform for building Web-based applications and services that can connect people across organisational and geographic boundaries.

2.2 History

Microsoft first brought SharePoint products and technologies to market in 2001. With each release there have always been 2 products. The first product (formally SharePoint Team Services and now Windows SharePoint Services) has always been offered as an add-on to Windows Server. On the assumption that companies already had licences for Windows Server and Windows Server Client Access (e.g. for File & Print services on a Windows network), Microsoft have offered this product “free of charge”. This has enabled organisations to receive tremendous value from this version of SharePoint for little or no investment. Consequently, Microsoft has enabled SharePoint to rapidly take market share from existing paid-for products like EMC Documentum eRoom & Lotus QuickPlace.

In addition to each team-oriented release, Microsoft have also released paid-for version of SharePoint that build on top of the basic, free version and add significant enterprise-level features. Originally, these features were largely based around positioning the full-version of SharePoint as a portal product (hence the name in 2001 & 2003 releases), however, with the most recent 2007 release, Microsoft have added significant new features that position SharePoint as more than just a portal technology. Details of these new features will be discussed later.

Provided below is a simple diagram showing the release cycle of SharePoint products and technologies since its first release through to the current v3 release.

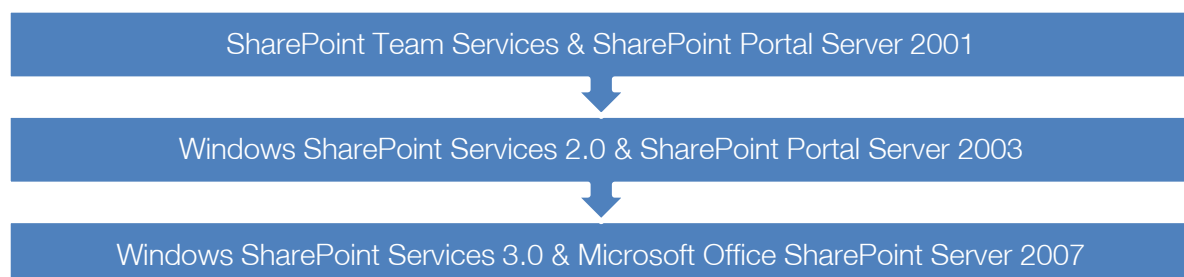


Figure 1: SharePoint release history

3 Windows SharePoint Services 3.0

3.1 Overview

Available free as a Windows Server 2003 component, Windows SharePoint Services 3.0 (WSS) offers basic web portal, collaboration & intranet services. It is very much designed as a product to allow teams to rapidly come together and use a single dedicated website to meet the communication and document sharing needs of the team through its lifecycle. Each WSS site is largely independent of all others meaning that WSS is therefore a “silo” based approach to information management and there is no real aggregation of information across sites. WSS also offers the ability to be used both internally and externally and is often deployed in an “extranet” like way to allow organisations to collaborate with customers, suppliers and partners.

3.2 Features

WSS offers a tremendous amount of functionality out of the box. Provided below are some of the key features offered out-of-the-box with explanation where necessary:

- Document Management (*check in/check-out, versioning, audit trails*)
- Predefined Workspaces (*templates for collaborative working that can be deployed instantly*)
- Meeting Workspaces
- Issue tracking
- Project tracking
- Blogs/Wikis (*Web 2.0 technologies*)
- Surveys, Discussions, and Links
- Calendars (*can be synchronised with Outlook*)
- Presence Awareness (*see if team members are online for instant messaging*)
- Two-Way Synchronization with Office Groove Workspaces (*for rich offline working*)
- Mobile Access (*lightweight versions of information for access via mobile devices*)
- Syndicate List Data with RSS (*Web 2.0*)
- Two-Stage Recycle Bin
- Folder and Item-Level Access Control
- Workflow
- Integration with Microsoft Office (*e.g. Word, Excel*)
- Extranet Mode for External Access

4 Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007

4.1 Overview

In many respects, Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 (MOSS) can be considered as enterprise extensions to WSS 3.0. MOSS utilises WSS as its underlying architecture so when MOSS is deployed, WSS is deployed first to provide the basic operations for storage, security and workflow. As previously mentioned, although MOSS does contain all the functionality offered in its previous Portal version, it is now more than just a portal product as several significant features have been added with this release. Firstly, Microsoft has merged their Content Management Server product with MOSS allowing for full web content management features to be available. BMN have recently completed a project for Universities UK (<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk>) that is a public facing Internet site built on SharePoint in which users are empowered to author, review and approve for publishing new content without having to involve IT staff. Microsoft has also added some key additional features such as Excel Calculation Services, which provides the ability to make Excel spreadsheets available via web browsers for interactive use, and InfoPath Forms Services, which allows rich business forms (e.g. Holiday Request) to be hosted within a browser.

4.2 Features

When considering the features that MOSS offers, it is often useful to group them logically into 6 pillars of functionality. The following diagram illustrates this approach:

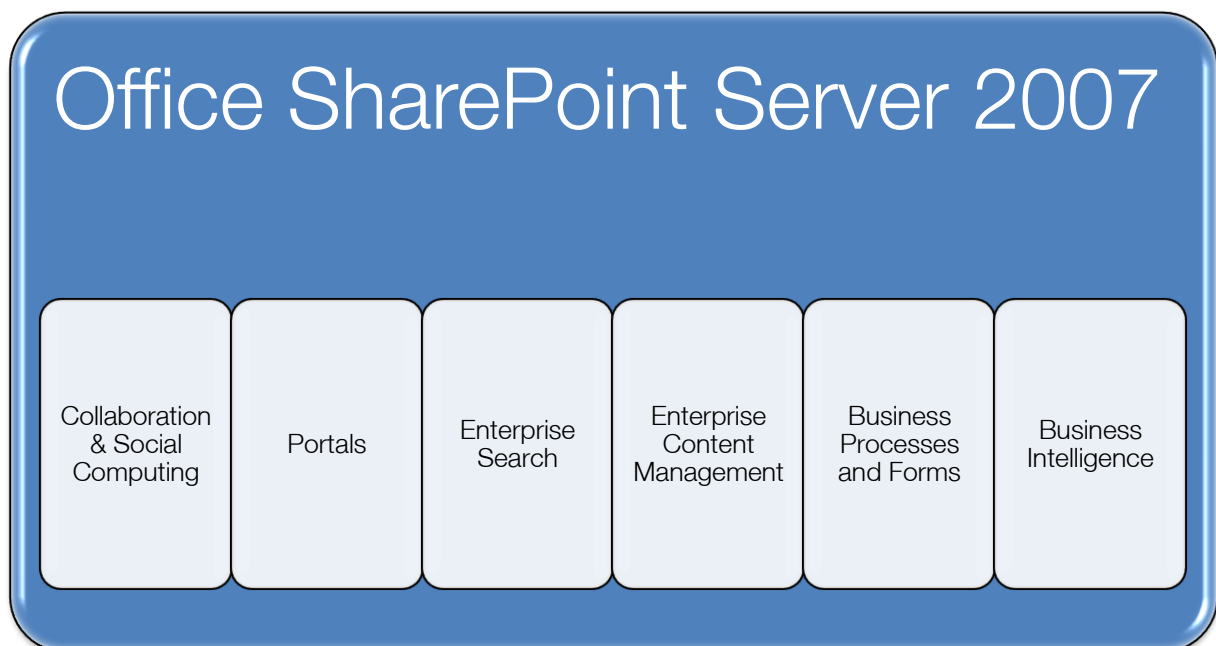


Figure 2: The 6 Pillars of MOSS functionality

4.2.1 Collaboration & Social Computing

The collaboration features in MOSS are largely the same as those found in WSS. Put a different way, WSS is essentially the Collaboration features of MOSS. The significant difference between collaboration in MOSS versus WSS is that through the availability of other pillars of functionality (e.g. Enterprise Search), information stored in a WSS site is more readily discoverable and aggregated.

Where there is a marked difference between WSS and MOSS, however, is in the area of Social Computing and specifically through the provision of the “My Site” feature. My Site is a personal website for each individual designed to provide personalised content, colleague tracking and highlight implicit relationships between the individual and other members of the organisation and information that they have generated that might be of interest to the individual.

Provided below is a screenshot of a My Site page.

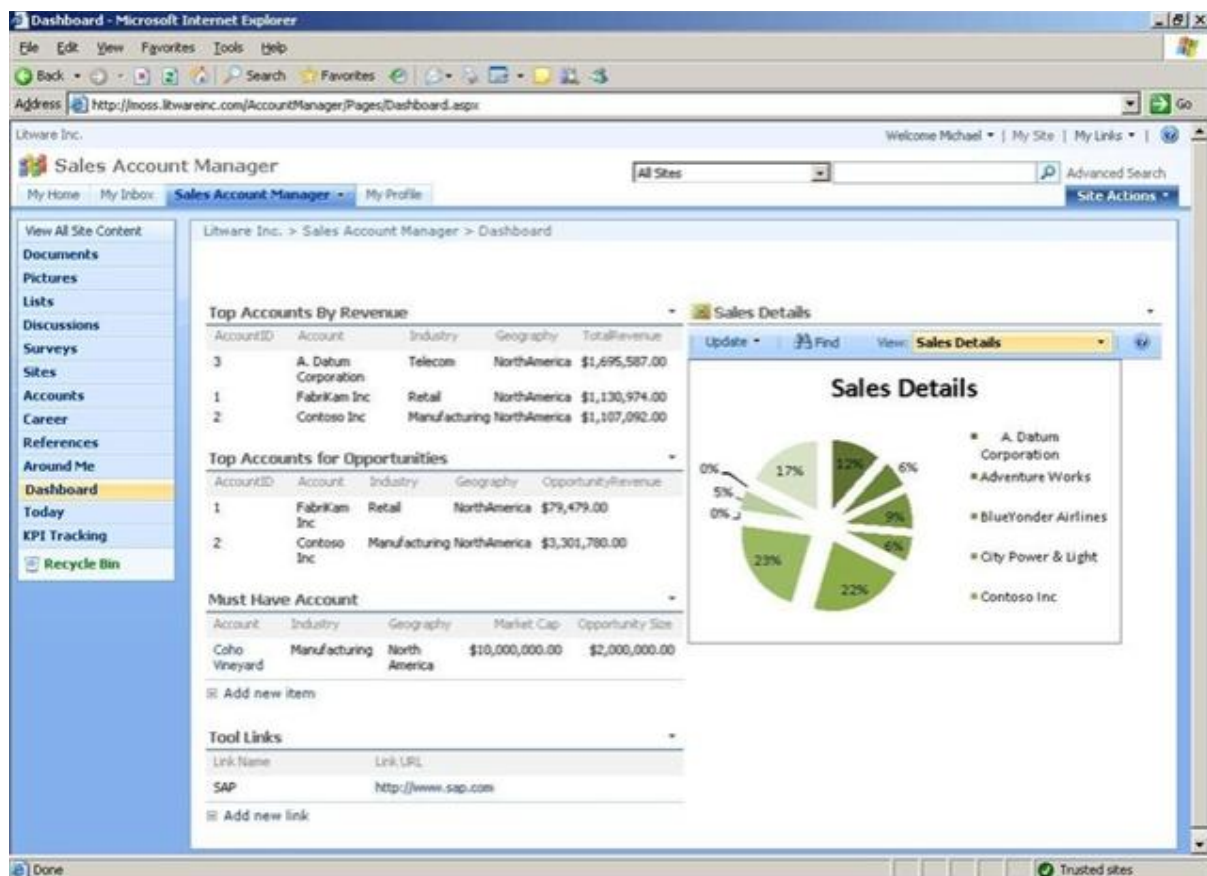


Figure 3: Example of a role based My Site

It is in the area of the “My Site” that BMN believes organisations could gain significant benefit by being able to embedded personalised resources (e.g. My Training Courses) directly within the context of the individual’s personal website.

4.2.2 Portals

The origins of MOSS lie in its design to offer portal computing. As such, MOSS is ideal for designing, deploying, and managing enterprise-class portals. Essentially, the purpose of a portal is to connect people to key business applications and provide an integration framework for assembling composite applications (e.g. aggregating information and functionality from multiple back-end resources and displaying in a single “composite” user interface). In many organisations, MOSS is used to provide a hierarchical structure of portals. Typically, the top-level portal would be company-wide followed by departmental portals and ultimately team-level portals. Through a process of audience targeting, content can be generated at lower levels and automatically aggregated and displayed at higher levels according to design.

4.2.3 Enterprise Search

Another key feature of MOSS is called Enterprise Search. Essentially, this is a search engine with enterprise-grade scalability, extensibility and manageability as well as robust security, usage analytics and reporting. MOSS Enterprise Search not only indexes SharePoint content but also file shares, websites, Exchange Public Folders, Lotus Notes databases and through its programming interface can be configured to search custom repositories as well (e.g. online learning catalogues). As well as indexing content, Enterprise Search also offers “People Search” which attempts to locate expertise within an organisation. As expected, Enterprise Search is fully integrated into Windows and Office products.

4.2.4 Enterprise Content Management

The Enterprise Content Management features of MOSS 2007 represent one of the major areas of investment by Microsoft in this new release. Building on the existing document management features of previous versions, Microsoft have added Integrated Rights Management (IRM) to ensure the highest levels of document security, Records Management to enforce information retention, protection and auditing policies as well as absorbing features from Microsoft Content Management Server to provide Web Content Management capabilities.

4.2.5 Business Process and Forms

One of the key areas of business activity that MOSS is designed to support is the automation of business processes through flexible forms design and built-in workflow templates. Much of this functionality is provided through a technology called “Forms Services”, which converts data-capture forms designed in Microsoft Office InfoPath into server based forms that can be used by browsers and mobile devices. Naturally, the orchestration of workflow is handled seamless between the various products of the Microsoft Office suite (e.g. approval notifications for a Word document stored in SharePoint are routed to the Outlook Inboxes of appointed individuals and when the user clicks on the link within the email the correct Word document is loaded and the workflow task automatically updated). Forms and Workflows can be designed either by Power Users using Microsoft Office products or by professional developers using Microsoft Visual Studio. An example of where Forms could be utilised by a Training & Capability Dev team could be the hosting of various training request applications forms that could be routed through line-managers for approval and ultimately to the team responsible for delivering this training to the individual.

4.2.6 Business Intelligence

The final pillar of functionality offered by MOSS 2007 is called Business Intelligence (BI). The BI platform offered by MOSS is a component of a wider strategy from Microsoft to provide a comprehensive Business Intelligence platform. Specifically within MOSS 2007, MOSS BI encompasses 3 key components:

- Excel Calculation Services (ECS)
- Dashboards & KPIs
- Business Data Catalog (BDC)

ECS is a technology to support the centralised storage and access to key Excel solutions with the aim being to expose access to Excel solutions without revealing processing logic (e.g. a mortgage calculator into which a user provides key data such as loan amount, interest rate, time period which then calculates monthly payments and overall cost with charts all delivered as a web page rather than a downloadable spreadsheet). ECS also allows certain areas of spreadsheets (e.g. Chart, Tables etc) to be published making it easier for users to provide access to aggregations and reports in a spreadsheet without over-burdening the user with excessive other sheets of raw or aggregated data.

Similar to the functionality previously discussed, MOSS enables the creation of rich, interactive BI dashboards that can draw data from various sources such as documents, spreadsheets (using ECS) and SQL Server.

Finally, the Business Data Catalog is a technology aimed at providing a consistent approach to business data integration. The BDC is designed to allow key company data, usually held in existing back-end Line-Of-Business applications to be integrated

into the SharePoint environment and then used throughout the SharePoint deployment. An example might be a CRM system that maintains a list of customers. This data can be synchronised with the SharePoint environment allowing this list of customers to be used (e.g. a customer pick-list) in business process forms or document management repositories (e.g. to associate a proposal document with a specific customer).