

Encouraging Greater SharePoint Adoption with DocAve



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Microsoft SharePoint is quickly becoming the platform of choice for organizations to not only store their enterprise-wide content and optimize daily productivity, but also enable true collaboration. Particularly with its latest release, Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010, the platform is positioned to take organizations to the next level – beyond use as a central document repository – for more advanced initiatives such as enterprise content management. However, as SharePoint’s usage evolves and grows, major challenges must be addressed regarding the platform’s scalability, reliability, and access the platform provides. If end-users cannot rely upon the platform to perform vital day-to-day tasks, they will revert to utilizing disparate local drives and email – exactly what companies were trying to avoid by deploying SharePoint in the first place.

In Microsoft’s [SharePoint Server 2010 Adoption Best Practices](#) whitepaper, they list several “must-have elements” as part of any organization’s adoption plan:

- Successful incorporation of the technology components that help drive adoption
- Start small and grow with the culture
- Implement a Training Plan and Communications Plan
- Decide on a Content Migration Strategy
- Have a User Support Plan
- Provide Incentives and Rewards
- Enable End-user Feedback

SharePoint Server 2010 incorporated many additional features to help improve reliability, scalability, and consequently increase adoption of the platform. As SharePoint is used for more complex business scenarios, more stringent requirements will come to the fore. So despite these improvements, some gaps still remain for third-party solutions to help enable enterprises reap the full benefits of their deployment.

In the coming pages, we will discuss the typical progression of SharePoint usage as well as native features available to encourage SharePoint adoption, focusing on the technology components required, scalability of the platform to accommodate growth, migration strategies, and how third-party solutions such as AvePoint’s DocAve Software Platform help ensure a scalable, reliable platform ripe for bolstered adoption.

About AvePoint

AvePoint is a global technology company and proven software leader headquartered in the United States. Since its founding in 2001, AvePoint has become the world’s largest provider of infrastructure management software solutions for Microsoft SharePoint Products and Technologies. Propelled by the world’s largest SharePoint-exclusive research & development team, AvePoint is the premier provider for organizations demanding the most powerful, flexible infrastructure management solutions for their SharePoint environments and assets. AvePoint’s award-winning DocAve Software Platform is recognized as the industry standard for comprehensive, scalable, and truly integrated SharePoint backup and recovery, administration, replication, migration, archiving, deployment management, reporting, storage optimization, and content lifecycle management solutions.

AvePoint is headquartered and maintains its principle engineering center in Jersey City, NJ, with wholly owned sales and engineering centers in the USA, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, South Africa, Japan, Singapore, and China. AvePoint’s global team, fortified by an expansive network of certified partners, helps more than 6,000 enterprise customers – including many Fortune 500 companies and government agencies – to protect, manage, optimize, and integrate their mission-critical SharePoint environments. AvePoint is a Depth Managed Gold Certified Microsoft Partner and GSA provider.

The Evolution of SharePoint Usage

There is no catch-all definition for SharePoint. Microsoft doesn't give a standard definition, either. Rather, the vendor says the platform was designed for "making it easier for people to work together", and defines it in terms of six capabilities.

Capabilities	Description
Sites	A single infrastructure for all business websites, sharing documents, managing projects, and publishing information.
Communities	Collaboration tools managed from a single platform to enable people to share ideas and work together.
Composites	Tools and components for line-of-business users to quickly create business solutions that suit their specific needs.
Content	Tools for enabling compliance measures – including document types, retention policies, and automatic content sorting – so end-users can work naturally in Microsoft Office without worrying about back-end management.
Insights	End-users have access to information in databases, reports, and business applications in order to make better, more actionable decisions.
Search	Enterprise Search and FAST Search provide a combination of relevance, refinement, and social cues to enable people to find the information and contacts they need to get their jobs done.

Essentially, SharePoint is whatever an organization wants it to be. Organizations can combine the available capabilities to achieve most any business object. The main consideration when planning your deployment strategy is how your business plans to use SharePoint, and the end-goal for the platform. Generally speaking, though, there are several common stages in the evolution of SharePoint usage in an organization:

- Content Repository
- Collaboration Tool
- Content-enabled Vertical Applications (Application Platform)
- Structured Data System

SharePoint as a Content Repository

Utilizing SharePoint as a content repository is a common initial deployment, as this is the least-complex – and least costly – deployment option. When planning the deployment of SharePoint for this business objective, one way to virtually assure increased user adoption of the platform is to make it the sole point of access for all enterprise content. While organizations in the past may have used local or shared drives to act as the one home for all enterprise-wide content, some inherent limitations existed with regard to maintaining a streamlined, current library of documents and other content. Some of the major advantages SharePoint has over these shared drives include:

- **SharePoint Lists** are optimal for presenting tables of information
- **Document Libraries** are a central, shared location to not only store documents, but also
 - Maintain versions so users can more easily locate the most up-to-date documents
 - Tag with enterprise-wide metadata with **Metadata Store** to improve content findability
 - Access controls and permissions to ensure users can only access and modify content appropriate to their job functions
 - Allocate specialty libraries – including pictures and slides - to truly centralize your content store

- **SharePoint Enterprise Search** and **FAST Search** increase findability of documents
- **SharePoint integrates with Microsoft Office applications** – including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint – with which end-users are already comfortable

SharePoint as a Collaboration Tool

The next step many organizations take after first deploying SharePoint is enabling its use as an enterprise-wide collaboration tool. Sure, companies can set up conference calls and even set up video meetings with workers in other departments, offices, or countries, but SharePoint provides a platform where everyone can have access to the same content, the same information, and the same documents in order to ensure everyone can have their say.

At its core, it is best to think of SharePoint as a department-wide or, better yet, company-wide Outlook:

- Calendars
- Task Lists
- Announcements
- Discussions
- Document Libraries

SharePoint as a Content-enabled Vertical Application

Once organizations have been working to ensure SharePoint is the central home for all enterprise-wide data and content, and using it for distributed end-users to come together to work on projects, SharePoint can then take the next step and act as an application for business-critical initiatives, including:

- Enterprise Content Management
- Intranet/Extranet Portal
- Website/Web Development Platform
- Knowledge Management System
- Project Management Tool
- Contract Origination and Processing
- Medical Records

SharePoint as a Structured Data System

Most of the aforementioned uses of SharePoint – with the exception of web content management – largely stay internal. By that, we mean that the benefits of SharePoint are at first, and primarily felt, within the business among its end-users. There are definite benefits that then extend to their dealings with external clients, customers, and/or partners, but it is not as clearly defined. When it comes to using SharePoint as a structured data system, clients, customers, and partners can actually interact with SharePoint in order to further an organization’s business aims, including:

- Transactional Processing
- Infopath Forms Integration
- Imaging and Document Scanning

Now that we’ve outlined the progression of SharePoint usage in a typical organization, let’s examine the two objectives necessary in helping encourage greater adoption – and usage – of the SharePoint platform: scalability & reliability, and SharePoint as the single point of access.

As SharePoint continues to evolve from a simple content repository into a full-blown collaboration system primed to help organizations launch application development and enterprise content management initiatives, the SharePoint platform will have to accommodate these changes. There are two main pillars that must be addressed to further encourage SharePoint adoption and ensure the platform is equipped to handle the growing demands of the enterprise: Scalability & Reliability, and SharePoint as the Single Point of Access.

Scalability & Reliability

As SharePoint becomes more heavily relied upon for daily productivity, business requirements for allowable access, download, and upload times may become more stringent. To keep from having to completely re-architect the existing SharePoint deployment each time the platform's role evolves, it is optimal to plan for scalability from the very beginning of the deployment.

However, not all companies always have the bandwidth to think of this from the outset, and SharePoint's growth will have implications on the deployment regardless of how much pre-planning occurred. With an expanding information architecture and number of sites, managing settings, permissions, and policies quickly becomes a challenge. Application deployment – even if considerations are made for maintaining separate environments for development, testing, staging, and production – could fall victim to human error or business disruption to the production environment. Service Level Agreements for content recoverability can be impacted with database growth. With an exponential amount of content to store, storage costs could increase and performance could suffer. Finally, geographically dispersed users will expect the same, fast access and service their local counterparts enjoy – and must be kept in synch with any content changes made through collaboration.

SharePoint Server 2010 offers several enhancements to help alleviate concerns regarding these points:

- Document workspaces and meeting workspace templates will automatically be provided to end-users when they are collaborating on documents or projects, and can be created with Microsoft Office clients – including Word, Outlook, and Excel – with **Site Management**.
- Organizations can extend their outward-facing look, feel, and brand to its SharePoint sites by utilizing **Site Themes**.
- **SharePoint Designer 2010** provides end-users with additional capabilities to implement customizations to their sites, empowering them to build workflows and reuse them across entire site collections – which can then be activated and used on multiple lists and libraries.
- Solutions can be created with Visual Studio 2010 and deployed as **Sandboxed Solutions** without IT's direct involvement, and will only have functionality on a site collection level and deployed by requisite site collection administrators – which can then be monitored by IT.
- Site administrators can view **intra-object policies and permissions** at once for a particular user or group, as well as to view lower level objects where inheritance has been broken.
- Enterprise-level taxonomy is supported with the **Metadata Store**. Users can create their organization's taxonomy structure – including hierarchy, product categories, and worldwide locations – and publish it to SharePoint.
- **Site collection level backup capabilities**, which are more granular than the database-level backups available in MOSS 2007. More granular restore functionality is available down to the list/library level via an unattached content database restore, as well as more fine-tuned control on platform-level backup to cover content and configurations separately.
- Synchronization with SharePoint sites and enable offline access to documents, lists, libraries, and line-of-business data with **SharePoint Workspace 2010**.

- Present and edit line-of-business (LOB) data in SharePoint from outside CRM and ERP systems with **Business Connectivity Services (BCS)**.
- The **Remote Blob Storage (RBS) API**, a SQL-based API, enables the storage of all content in a Site Collection on the file system (with metadata retained in the SQL content database), offloading it from the SQL Server content database.
- **Large List Throttling** accommodates more items per list, which minimizes the number of document libraries necessary to implement and subsequently simplifies management and administration.

Organizations can take advantage of these additional features and enhance their planning and governance strategies. For instance, if organizations plan on instituting a multiple farm approach and want to improve their production environment's stability by properly testing any new features or solutions beforehand, they should plan for global change management and incorporate documentation policies to ensure repeatability of change. Administration of the increasing number of sites can be delegated to lower level administrators, relieving IT management of some of this burden. If organizations plan on distributing various administration tasks, such as site or content creation, permissions management, and policy implementation, determining which stakeholders will be responsible for making those changes should be properly documented as well.

However, there are some gaps that still remain. Now, let's take a look at four vital challenges that might not be adequately addressed solely utilizing Microsoft's native features depending on organization-specific architecture requirements – and how AvePoint's DocAve Software Platform addresses them.

Challenges	Opportunities with DocAve
Provide reliable SharePoint access and collaboration for geographically dispersed users, while accommodating for externalized content and limited bandwidth availability.	DocAve Replicator for SharePoint offers granular content and configuration replication – one-way, two-way, and one-to-many – among any SharePoint farms, including compression, throttling controls, byte-level differencing, and offline replication features.
Streamline the content, application, and software development and publication lifecycles to minimize human error, improve production farm integrity, and maintain a positive user experience.	DocAve Deployment Manager for SharePoint automates the deployment of applications, customizations, solutions, and design elements across sites, and farms.
Optimize SQL Server content database resources in order to improve performance, scalability, and reliability of the SharePoint platform.	<p>DocAve Extender for SharePoint utilizes Microsoft's EBS and RBS APIs, immediately routing BLOBs to file or cloud-based storage according to customizable file-size triggers.</p> <p>DocAve Connector for SharePoint exposes external content residing in network and cloud file shares to SharePoint without the need for migration.</p> <p>DocAve Archiver for SharePoint archives SharePoint content – from SQL Server content databases and/or BLOB stores – to lower-tiered storage via a customizable business-rule based engine.</p>
Protect SharePoint and meet evolving Service Level Agreements by ensuring swift recovery of all farm components, including externalized content.	<p>DocAve Backup and Restore for SharePoint granular backup and full-fidelity restore all SharePoint farms – including externalized BLOBs, solutions, configurations, and web front-end components – from a single interface.</p> <p>DocAve High Availability for SharePoint maintains a warm stand-by environment for one-switch failover to provide continuous SharePoint availability in the case of a major business disruption or natural disaster.</p>

SharePoint as the Single Point of Access

A sure-fire way to increase SharePoint adoption is to make the platform the sole point of access for all enterprise content. While that may seem simple on the surface, it can be much more complex and require a great deal of foresight, planning and, potentially, help from a third-party vendor.

There are two sub-objectives to this overarching goal to make SharePoint a true one-stop shop for access:

1. **Optimize global access to SharePoint.** Business users are going to use the means by which they can complete their task the fastest – and most successfully. That said, if they can access a document quicker by having a colleague email it to them as opposed to downloading it from SharePoint, they will pick that option every single time. If download times are too long, end-users will store content on their local drives, and only update it/take note of modifications others have made once a week (if that). This defeats the entire purpose for deploying SharePoint in the first place.
2. **Make SharePoint the one place to access all enterprise content.** Instead of sending end-users to Shared Drives for some documents, EMC Documentum for others, and Lotus Notes for a few legacy pieces, give workers access to all content either within – or through – SharePoint. There must be a way to either move all enterprise content into SharePoint, or allow users to view content via the platform.

Native SharePoint Server 2010 capabilities allow organizations to:

- Synchronize with SharePoint sites and offline access to documents, lists, libraries, and line-of-business data with **SharePoint Workspace 2010**.
- Present and edit line-of-business (LOB) data in SharePoint from outside CRM and ERP systems with **Business Connectivity Services (BCS)**.
- Enable the storage of all content in a Site Collection on the file system, offloading it from the SQL Server content database, with the **RBS API**.
- By integrating with Office 2010 and SharePoint Server 2010, **remote BLOB caching** can improve subsequent access times for large BLOBs

However, if these enhancements prove inadequate for enabling fast global access to SharePoint, organizations may consider a distributed, fully replicated SharePoint architecture. For this scenario, Microsoft recommends organizations turn to third-party vendors providing synchronization and replication solutions. Let's examine how DocAve solves that challenge, among several others when positioning SharePoint as the sole point of access for all enterprise-wide data and content.

Challenge	Opportunity with DocAve
Provide reliable SharePoint access for geographically dispersed users, while accounting for externalized content and limited bandwidth availability.	DocAve Replicator offers one-way, two-way, and one-to-many synchronizations of SharePoint data and content – either in real-time or according to pre-determined schedules.
Optimizing SQL Server content database resources by externalizing BLOBs to improve performance and access times.	DocAve Extender automatically routes any unstructured documents, or Binary Large Objects (BLOBs), to cheaper, file- or cloud-based storage without ever entering SQL.
Migrating enterprise content residing in various repositories into SharePoint, while maintaining all metadata and securities.	DocAve Migrator enables administrators to automate the process of consolidating content from 14 legacy repositories into SharePoint with full fidelity.
Exposing file-share content in SharePoint as fully functional SharePoint objectives without the need to migrate – and subsequently decrease SharePoint deployment efforts.	DocAve Connector for SharePoint presents and manages any documents, audio, or video files via SharePoint without the need for import. Overcome SharePoint's file-size limitation of 2 gigabytes to ensure no content is left behind.

SharePoint is quickly becoming an optimal platform for organizations to transform their business practices, whether it is completed by utilizing the platform as a content repository, collaboration forum, enterprise content management platform, or structured data solution. The possibilities SharePoint offers are virtually endless.

The only contingency, however, to unlocking SharePoint's true potential is in encouraging broad SharePoint adoption among end-users. This is possible by ensuring scalability and reliability, as well as making SharePoint the only point of access for all enterprise-wide content.

While Microsoft offers native features and tools to help in these two aims, consider AvePoint's DocAve Software Platform for completely optimizing SharePoint storage, access, reliability, and scalability.

AvePoint Global Headquarters
3 Second Street
Jersey City, NJ 07311, USA

Phone: 1.201.793.1111
Fax: 1.201.217.8709

For more information, visit www.AvePoint.com.

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Changes

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