Real Story GROUP

MAKE BETTER TECHNOLOGY DECISIONS

Excerpt from:

Evaluating SharePoint

A Comprehensive Evaluation of SharePoint in the Enterprise

Table of Contents

Subsequent to introductory chapters, summaries, and ratings charts, we provide in-depth evaluations of each product we cover. These evaluations provide details about the strengths and weaknesses of the products, and give insight and explanations of the ratings. Below is a sample; each product is evaluated using the same criteria.

Microsoft: SharePoint 2013 for ECM and Cloud File Sharing

sharepoint.microsoft.com

Vendor at a Glance

Specsheet	Microsoft SharePoint 2013 Summary
Geography	Global
What's New	• SharePoint 2013 released with modest functional improvements • Vendor is increasingly focused on promoting the cloud version
Strengths	• Takes advantage of core SharePoint Foundation and a rich API • Potentially useful retention and policy capabilities • Decent folder processing and taxonomy services that make the platform better suited to traditional document management scenarios • Strong integration with Microsoft Office makes it very useful for Office-based document management scenarios • Comparatively more user friendly, and easier to install and propagate than heavyweight document management tools • Search works comparatively well within an all-SharePoint environment • Platform boasts exceptionally broad, unofficial support community • SaaS-based offering is almost feature-equivalent to on-premise version • Localized in an impressive list of languages • A good fit for enterprises that are new to document management or don't need highly structured, complex solutions

Specsheet	Microsoft SharePoint 2013 Summary
Weaknesses	• Comparatively light or non-existent support for document imaging, formal digital asset management, archiving, and COLD/ERM • Not designed for high-volume or transactional environments • No native physical records management services • Individual file size limit of 2 GBs makes it unsuitable for some scenarios • Once you get beyond the basics, platform quickly becomes deceptively complicated and developer-intensive • Cloud-based offerings are woefully integrated with on-premise farms, effectively ruling out hybrid offering in major enterprises • Some services and functionalities require Office 2010 or higher • Likely a poor fit for large enterprises that need a one-stop shop for document management or that have industrial-strength document management or compliance needs • Emphasis on localized, bottom-up site provisioning encourages departmental freelancing that mitigates against enterprise governance • Some new features in 2013 edition remain shallow
Potential Fit	Workgroup Collaboration
Unlikely Fit	High-Volume Imaging, Case Management
Compare To	IBM, Oracle, SpringCM, OpenText
Operating System	Microsoft Windows Server
Repository	Database: MS SQL Server
App Platform	.NET
Licensing	Complicated: Seat-plus-server licenses on premise; seat licenses for Office 365 cloud version
Ownership	Public (NASDAQ: MSFT)

Summary

Scenario Fits	
Enterprise Content Platform	◑
Basic Document Lifecycle Management	◕
Process and Case Management	◑
Cloud File Sharing and Sync	◔
High-Volume Imaging	○
Information Governance	◔
Document-Centric Collaboration	●

Microsoft SharePoint 2013 is best understood as two different ECM offerings:

- Out of the box, a decent solution for workgroup collaboration around Office-based documents, either on-premise or in the cloud as part of Office 365
- As a development platform for more complex ECM solutions, with a significant investment in customization, extension, or third-party add-ons

This dual nature of SharePoint accounts for its beguiling promise and its many frustrations in an enterprise context. Microsoft markets the platform as a ready-made, easy-to-use product for replacing your dependence on shared drives, but enterprise customers quickly realize that

business stakeholders often require much more. Microsoft's vast implementation channel makes an excellent living creating essential applications from what is a highly extensible platform.

Let's start with the first value proposition, as a basic product. In its native incarnation, SharePoint represents basic document management for the general office worker, particularly knowledge workers laboring in teams. This is a highly valuable and much-needed service, and helps account for much of SharePoint's success in the marketplace. The 2013 edition of SharePoint has improved on these capabilities, if more in degree than kind.

However, SharePoint handles Office-type documents, rather than large repositories of scanned image files or transactional document processes. That's your first clue that you typically wouldn't use it for high-volume, process-heavy scenarios, or those that require large files (e.g., HD video or large engineering files).

Ultimately, SharePoint's enterprise ambitions are realized more in breadth than in depth. Microsoft doesn't "do" applications, like, for example, Contract Management; it leaves those to integrators or software partners (like OpenText). Natively, the platform remains incomplete for advanced DM use cases. Budget your time and resources accordingly.

Introduction

It was actually a great surprise to Redmond when SharePoint became a runaway success within just a few years of its initial release. Microsoft had stumbled on a pervasive user need for basic document sharing and simple workgroup portals that the marketplace had grievously underestimated. It helped that the product was tremendously easy to install and the core Windows SharePoint Services came at no additional cost with Windows Server.

A quiet army of Microsoft-trained administrators installed the product, and a huge array of Microsoft partners grew to support and extend it. It became increasingly clear, however, that SharePoint was not really designed for the breadth and depth of environments for which it was applied. Not surprisingly, problems arose around scalability, security, and administrative management. Many of those problems linger — even after multiple new editions.

By SharePoint 2010, the platform had become a cornerstone of Redmond's middleware strategy and strategic effort to connect Office (the most lucrative Microsoft offering) web-based applications. This effort has continued in the era of the cloud as Redmond aggressively pushes SharePoint online as a key component of Office365.

Figure 1. Microsoft messaging now takes a more task-oriented approach, although the latest version of the platform is really a stepped evolution of SP 2010. Note the renewed emphasis on SharePoint as an application development platform.

In 2013, Redmond made marginal feature improvements to SharePoint's DM services, most notably around some interface niceties and surprisingly comprehensive eDiscovery and search services. Note that like previous versions, Redmond divides SP 2013 into for-pay and free versions.

Except where noted specifically below, we review full SharePoint capabilities, including the Enterprise license in an on-premise installation (for more on licensing, see Vendor Intangibles, below). However, we will note key differences for Office 365 (specifically SharePoint Online) throughout the review as well.

Functionality

Functional Services	
Document Management	◑
Document Collaboration	●
RM and Archiving	◑
BPM and Workflow	◔
eForms	◕
Imaging and Scanning	○
Mobile Access	◔
File Sync & Offline	◑

Document Management

SharePoint has reasonably strong repository services. At the outset, SharePoint provides check-in and check-out functionality. SharePoint users can check out a document (making it unavailable for editing by others), or download a read-only copy.

Microsoft supports Information Management policies, which allow more lifecycle control over content through the Content Type construct. Through these policies, firms can implement controls like periodic content reviews, automatic bar coding & document identifiers, content reorganization, and automatically initiate a workflow.

SP 2013 adds an e-discovery layer on top of this, as well as the ability to apply retention rules to an entire site, rather than individual content types. You can also group documents into "sets" and process them together (including adding metadata in bulk). All good stuff.

Another area of improvement in SP 2013 is the near ubiquitous feature of dragging and dropping desktop files or emails into folders that represent SharePoint libraries. It demos well, but in real life, you may find this service a bit thin. When dragging documents or adding from Outlook, you can't select the content type and in many cases are not prompted for metadata (and if metadata is required, the document won't appear for others).

On the plus side, SP 2013 carries forward the generally praised "Managed Metadata Service," which enables publishing a term store and content types, which are then consumed by different web apps, site collections, or sites.

Depending on the level of control you want to have and the scope of the application, you can apply different models of tagging. You can implement a "Managed Taxonomy" for a highly structured, controlled environment that requires users to apply terms from a controlled vocabulary set.

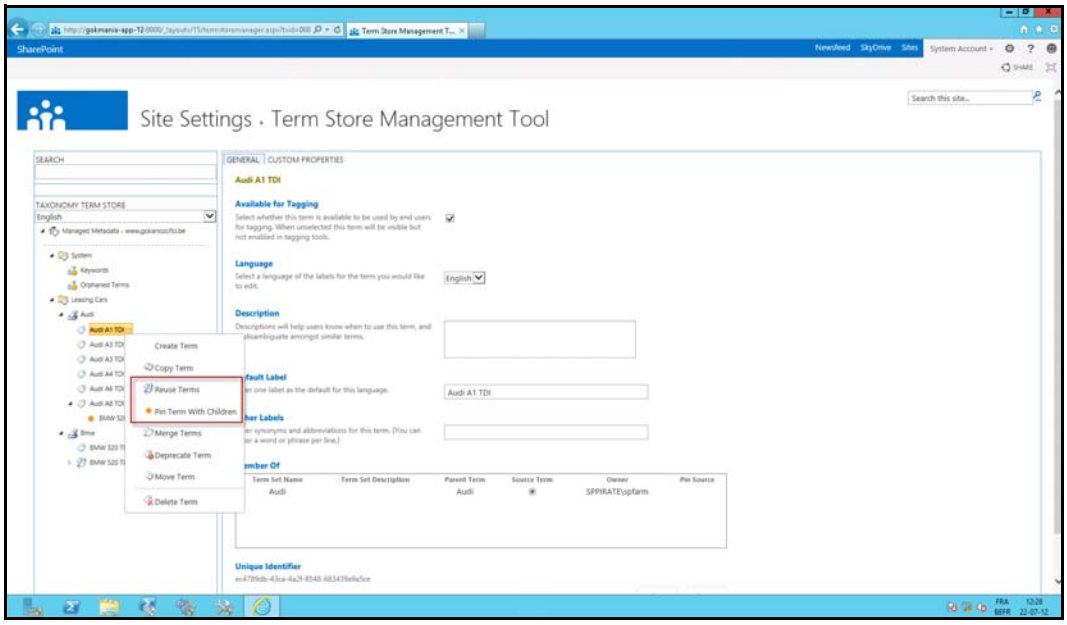


Figure 2. Configuring a Term Store.

You can implement a more flexible regime where users add new terms as free-form keywords (a.k.a., a "folksonomy"). A managed taxonomy is suitable for a records management scenario; a folksonomy is more suitable for a blog. Tags can be applied uniformly from within SharePoint, InfoPath, and Office applications.

Note that #hashtags now represent a third form of metadata in SharePoint. To the extent that the three datasets don't always integrate the way you might expect, both implementers and end-users need to plan information retrieval strategies very carefully.

The picture with repository search has become much clearer with SP 2013. It's basically a rewrite of FAST Search, although supposedly it incorporates some features from the previous

"SharePoint Search." Although some highly advanced FAST features have been dropped in this rewrite, this is good news, since search is now optimized more intimately for SharePoint.

In addition to performance improvements, the SP 2013 search now takes advantage of social signals such as likes and mentions, to improve precision and connect results to people more readily. It can access the full depth and width of your SharePoint estate, providing unified, security-trimmed results. The results page sports noticeable improvements in clustering, preview, and filtering.

Figure 3. Search services have been largely rewritten in SP 2013, and the results seem promising. In the image above, a user hovers over a document to see a preview, just as in the 2010 version of FAST.

Note the caveats that apply to nearly all other SharePoint services:

- Initial configurations are easy, but more advanced customization can become very complicated — very quickly
- Woe to those licensees who don't have good software configuration management practices in place
- In 2013 you may need more hardware (and therefore licenses) dedicated to search

The new search in SP 2013 brings four additional potential downsides:

- Early testing with some of the guesswork that the search service tries to undertake (on things like document metadata and individual users preferences) can lead to quirky results
- The platform is no longer optimized for "enterprise search" — e.g., to index content stores outside of the Microsoft family, unless you turn to third-party connectors

- Showing cloud and on-premise SharePoint search results in a truly integrated fashion is difficult and potentially expensive (more about that below)
- The major revisions underneath the covers change your default search results substantially — maybe dramatically from SP 2010 to SP 2013. Test carefully and plan for post-migration work here.

To be fair, you likely no longer need a third-party search engine for decent search in SharePoint 2013, unless you need to execute something complex, like ontology services.

Document Collaboration

SharePoint effectively addresses the low-hanging fruit of document-based collaboration: file organizing, tracking, and sharing.

In particular, SharePoint is positioned well to enable multiple authors to collaborate on the creation and manipulation of content — particularly Office files. In this regard, Microsoft has done a decent job creating an integrated approach to both the creation of content and further editing, as well as the creation of collaborative spaces to manipulate documents.

The latest version continues Redmond's efforts to compete with Google Docs by providing simultaneous authoring capabilities for licensees of Office 2010 or 2013. However, it doesn't quite mimic Google's offering, inasmuch as authors cannot work on the same paragraph together, and some changes made by others don't become apparent until after they've saved a document.

There is a feature that enables co-browsing in PowerPoint. You can run through a presentation and follow the slide transition.

The short story is that collaborative editing works pretty well if you're using Office. However, you'll be reduced to a more traditional check-in/check-out process with other tools.

This is one of the few areas where the SharePoint cloud version delivers extra services. First, by default you can invite external users to "external sharing sites," for the most part without paying for extra licenses, if you have one of the enterprise license plans. Second, if you license Exchange Online, you can create "site mailboxes. These are project inboxes that combine emails and documents about a project. To view them in Outlook, though, you need Outlook 2013.

As mentioned above, attachments and other documents that end up in the mailbox don't leverage much of SharePoint's wider document management services, such as metadata and versioning; you'll need some education and training here. In addition, it's brand new; test carefully.

Records Management & Archiving

You can apply retention policies to libraries, content types (most common), or in SP2013 to an entire site. A "Content Organizer" enables a Records Manager to create rules to put records at the right place in the file plan.

As for formal records, in SP2013 you can still manage them "in-place" or via special Records Centers. The former is more convenient for employees; the latter offers more functionality to records management.

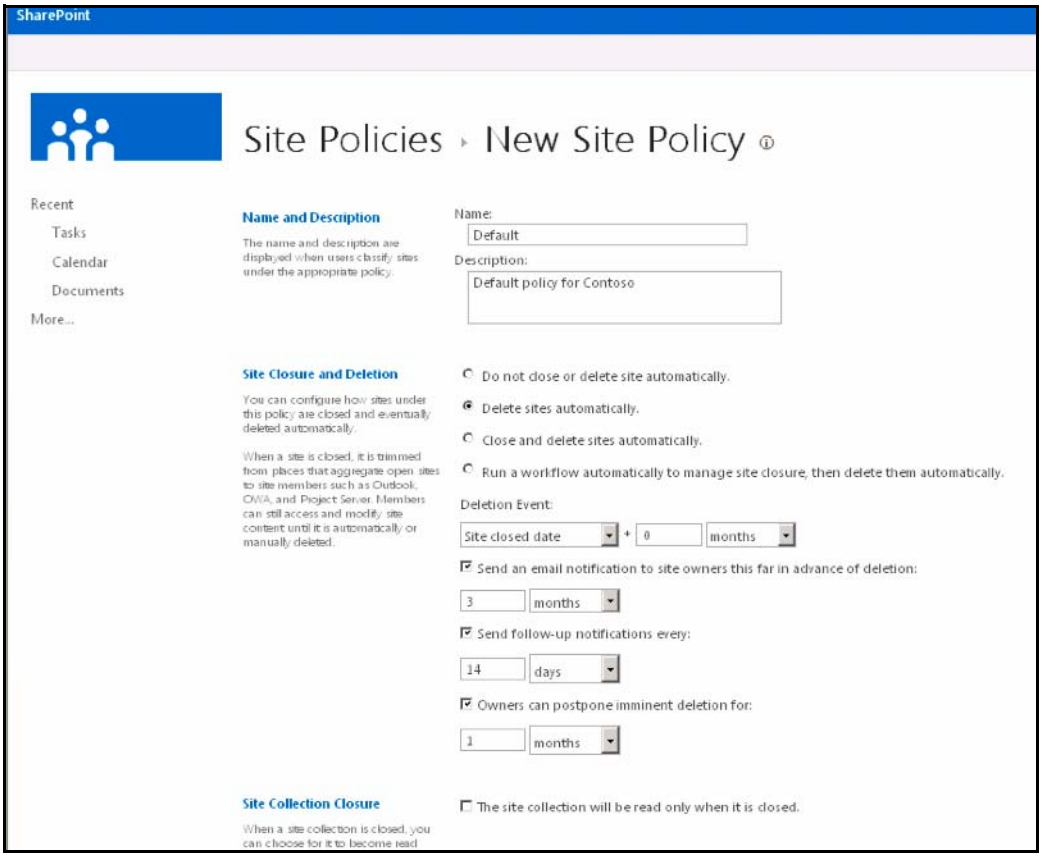


Figure 5. In SP 2013, you can set retention policies on sites.

A prudent administrator will activate these RM features with care. It can become a surprise to workaday, knowledge-based employees when email and documents are hardened and moved to an untouchable records repository.

Note that RM services work only within SharePoint. This is important because Microsoft has no native hooks into other products on the desktop or records in other repositories. There is no notion of federated RM across repositories, so for enterprises where records exist all over the shop, in various repositories and locations (and need to be managed in context), SharePoint will deal with only part of the picture. Therefore, what you are really getting is RM for SharePoint, rather than RM for your enterprise.

SharePoint has other limitations when it comes to formal RM, not the least of which is its inability to manage physical records out of the box. However, there is no shortage of third-party vendors hoping to fill that gap.

The bigger shortcoming is SharePoint's difficulty in managing compliance issues effectively over a large number of SharePoint instances in a centralized and federated manner. As we have seen in many enterprises, SharePoint can grow at viral rates, yet Microsoft only has the ability to manage ideal scenarios, of one or two closely integrated instances, with a heavy dependence on content types (of which you may end up having hundreds).

Records managers will struggle to manage this situation in a holistic manner. Hence, many larger customers turn to more scalable solutions from the likes of HP, EMC, or OpenText, to layer on top of larger SharePoint deployments.

As for archiving, enterprises that take this seriously will frequently license a third-party tool that can effectively extract the relevant information — documents, metadata, and policies — from SQL Server and SharePoint for long-term storage.

SharePoint's first obstacle here is its reliance on SQL Server as its native repository. If you need to store content for 10 years or more, then you would have to keep the SQL databases running for that period, running in parallel with the related SharePoint sites. Moreover (as with any relational database), large volumes of BLOBs can slow SQL Server performance — another reason to move inactive content onto a separate storage media. (No major document management system archives content in the database; they archive content on file servers or storage devices.)

Moreover, there are basic issues of scale here. Microsoft recommends for most cases that a SharePoint content database can hold no more than 100-200 GBs of data — a level that some organizations reach on a daily basis. To be sure, you can assign multiple content databases, but this requires advanced planning, and each instance requires care and feeding. This is not the same kind of robust repository you would find with EMC or IBM.

In theory, you can use "Remote BLOB Storage" (RBS) services to offload files to a file system. In practice, these services remain very generic out of the box, and you would need to develop a custom application to do this. In fact, most SharePoint storage partners leverage RBS — it's just that they've done the grunt coding.

The good news is that you can avail yourself of several credible SharePoint archiving vendors here.

Business Process Management & Workflow

For any decent document management application, workflow and business process management (BPM), are quite important. SharePoint offers both simple and advanced workflow configurations, but it still lags its competitors when it comes to more process-oriented BPM.

Workflows are part of the core SharePoint foundation and can cope with general routing and approval cycle needs. In SharePoint, you create simple workflows using a browser. However, as the complexity of workflow increases, you will need to use other tools to model these workflows. To be specific, you will probably end up using multiple tools including SharePoint Designer, Visio, Visual Studio, and perhaps even the Workflow SDK. Depending on your technical skills and licensing arrangements, this could turn out to be cumbersome and expensive. To be fair to Microsoft, they have tried to make it a seamless experience with a bi-directional import and export between Visio and SharePoint Designer.

You can visualize workflows as they progress, which is achieved by using Visio services. Within the browser, a diagram with a set of annotations shows where the process is at any point in time. The workflow forms are powered by InfoPath (this would be another tool you might need to use to customize your forms) and can be customized.

In this release, workflows are reusable, which means you can create new workflows based on existing ones. Unlike previous versions where a workflow had to be associated with a list

(which meant you often had to create a dummy list), workflows now can be associated with a site or a content type. Since they are reusable, you can associate them to any list as well, and there is no need to have a pre-defined list association.

SharePoint workflows have not been built to meet complex process management needs. To do that and stay entirely within the Microsoft environment, you would need to use the Workflow SDK with Visual Studio and the BizTalk server; in other words, you would have to build the solution to a large degree by yourself.

There is some customer excitement about the ability to use workflows directly in Office applications. From a usability perspective, this is certainly helpful for simple, Office-oriented routing, but it does not constitute a full workflow tool. Microsoft recommends K2 as a third-party vendor for enterprise workflow, but there are many other options available.

Imaging and Scanning

Document imaging and capture refers fundamentally to converting paper-based information to electronic files (either scanned images or text files or both), and managing the process of the capture image and data. Document imaging is one of the most important elements of document management, and makes up a disproportionately large chunk of the document management market. It involves the capture of large volumes (many thousands per day) of faxes or scanned images, typically from a distributed capture environment. Usually, these are converted to a TIFF (or similar) format, and at the same time, data is extracted and validated from a free-form document such as a letter, or a semi-structured document, such as a form. Depending on the data extracted, the file with then be routed according to pre-defined rules, in a specific business process.

Capture and imaging in SharePoint requires using third-party software. For a variety of reasons (including the fact that SharePoint stores files directly in SQL Server), this is not a suitable platform for high-volume or transactional imaging and image management. To be sure, other imaging vendors — particularly those that focus on workgroup scenarios — have gotten very enthusiastic about the rise of SharePoint, as it gives them a potentially very accessible repository in which to dump scanned images, a store that is likely to be familiar to prospective customers.

Overall, imaging requires you to work with a Microsoft partner (such as KnowledgeLake, Captiva, or Kofax), but the forms capabilities are quite impressive.

Unfortunately, we have observed some channel partners (unscrupulously) try to sell SharePoint as a suitable platform for imaging, only to add large fees for associated development and consulting work to extend it to a level where it may be able to cope with these demands. Instead, you're better off buying a SharePoint-friendly imaging extension from one of many available resellers.

Mobile Access

By default, SharePoint recognizes mobile devices through User Agent (UA) strings, and redirects to a mobile version of a site.

In SP 2013, there are five choices:

1. **Classic View** – The same SP 2010 mobile version displays a prosaic list of libraries that Redmond has "mobilized." You can click through a list or library to see individual list items in mobile form. You set this to display when the user has a non-HTML5-compatible browser.
2. **Contemporary View** – This is a slicker, more modern UI built with HTML5, including touchscreen support.
3. **Full Site UI** – This is essentially your full desktop experience. This is likely to render reasonably well on a tablet, but not on a smartphone, since SP 2013 doesn't natively support Responsive Design. However, it is not optimized for touch. You can default to this view for certain devices; alternatively, the user can click to it from the Contemporary View.
4. **SharePoint SDK** – The SDK can develop your own mobile web apps, or better "mobilize" your various SharePoint sites better than the default views. This could become necessary after substantial customization or extension of default team sites.
5. **Deploy Native Apps** – Today, Microsoft itself only provides one: a Newsfeed app for iOS and Android. As with SharePoint 2010, a rich array of third-party vendors are bringing out their own native apps for SP 2013.

On the downside, the sophisticated "Mobile Views" capability that manages and extends master pages for different mobile experiences is only available for Publishing Sites (i.e., websites), not for collaboration sites.

File Sync and Offline

For file sync, Microsoft offers SkyDrive Pro as an option for SharePoint on-premise or bundled within your Office365 license (more about Office 365 in "Key Considerations for Office 365" on page 12). SkyDrive Pro allows employees to sync their MySite content or any document library to their local machines.

Unfortunately, native mobile client support remains thin, so it's not well suited for mobile synching.

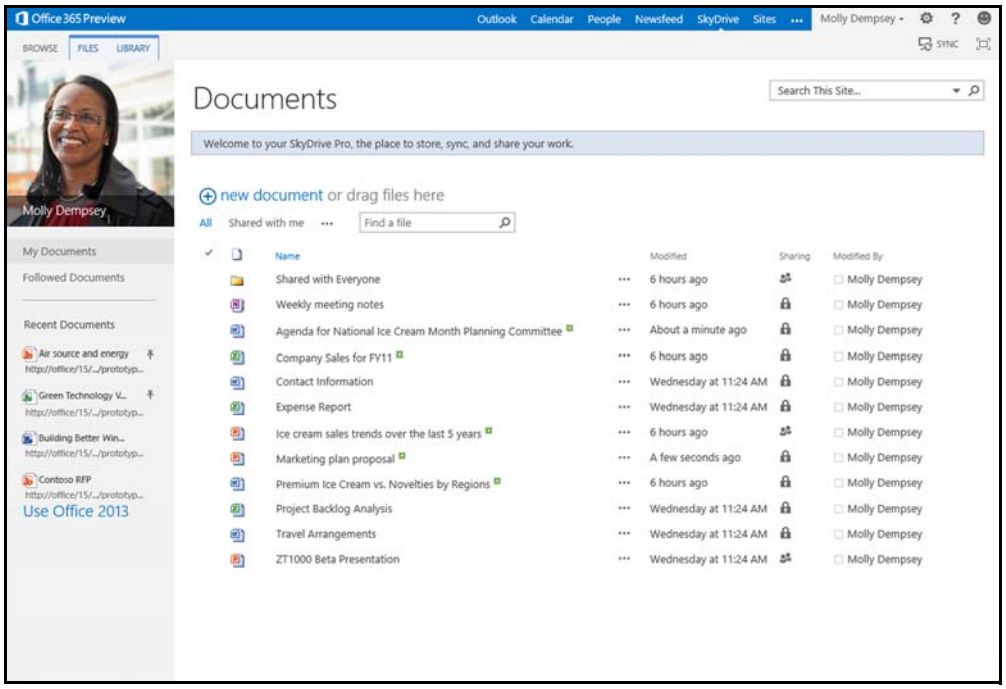


Figure 6. SkyDrive Pro for an Office 365 user.

Key Considerations for Office 365

After some early skepticism about cloud computing, Microsoft has taken to the model with the zealotry of an apostate. The company has converted most of its own internal SharePoint estate to Office 365 — at much pain and expense: more about that later — and is heavily promoting that alternative to its traditional enterprise customers. Among other benefits, Microsoft promises a more rapid innovation model, rather than the sluggish, 3-year development cycle associated with SharePoint on-premise.

Although Microsoft has won some big customers to this model, it's safe to say that most major enterprises are taking a wait-and-see approach on Office 365 in general and SharePoint Online in particular. As of April 2013, Microsoft conceded that 90 percent of Office 365 customers had 50 or fewer employees.[1]

From a functional standpoint, SharePoint Online offers somewhat more and somewhat less than the on-premise version. Some differences are highlighted in the evaluation categories later in this chapter, but here's a quick summary of the delta.

On the plus side, SharePoint Online has:

- Better integration with Yammer and SkyDrive Pro (included in Office 365 for file sharing and synching)
- Some extra collaboration features when you also license Exchange Online
- Support for the new "Apps" model for application extension

1. http://www.citeworld.com/cloud/21713/old-ways-die-hard-office-365-not-penetrating-enterprise-yet

On the downside, SharePoint Online has:

- Reduced support for custom applications and multi-collection management
- Reduced capabilities to customize user experiences
- Fewer management and administrative services
- No native analytics
- No claims-based authentication
- Somewhat reduced records management and e-discovery capabilities
- Individual file size limit of 2GBs — a big deal in some enterprises
- Shockingly poor support for hybrid environments (more about that below)

To be sure, most document and records management features are now fully functional in the new cloud version; however, the cloud version is missing some of the same enterprise-y management services that make SharePoint a potentially attractive candidate despite its manifold shortcomings from a business scenario perspective.

Like all SaaS services, SharePoint Online has experienced the occasional hiccups with upgrades. You can only postpone upgrades on your cloud estate for 60 days.

Office 365 does not run in Azure; instead, it runs within dedicated Microsoft data centers in North America, EMEA, and Asia-Pac. The core architecture resembles that of an on-premise installation, but you have very limited access to the underlying systems and even log files. For the largely SMB customer base, this is a benefit. Microsoft is providing SharePoint as a service here, with some limitations cited earlier.

For customers with incumbent SharePoint installations, a hybrid approach will prove tricky and potentially very costly. When Microsoft itself migrated the majority of its SharePoint estate to Office 365, the expense creating custom Azure and on-premise solutions for replication outweighed the savings they otherwise enjoyed.

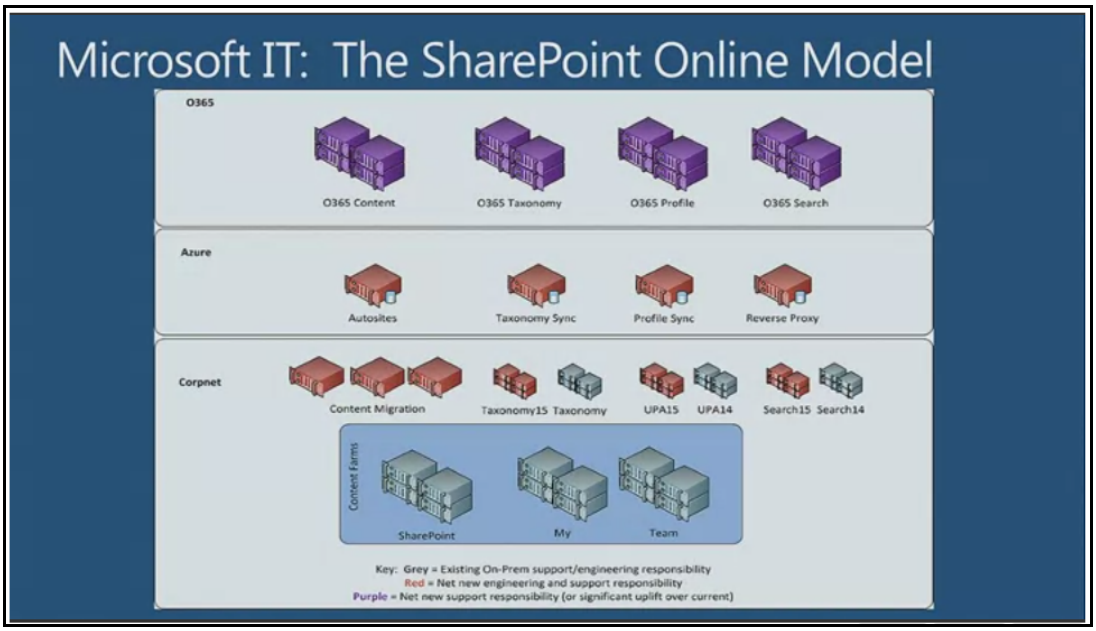


Figure 7. Microsoft messaging now takes a more task-oriented approach, although the latest version of the platform is really a stepped evolution of SP 2010. Note the renewed emphasis on SharePoint as an application development platform.

For hybrid deployment, Microsoft itself built the complex, Azure-based integration environment, with localized replication, which negated long-term cost savings.[1]

Specifically, the Microsoft IT team found it difficult and costly to sync:

- Search
- Activity Streams
- Taxonomies
- Workflows (models and instances)
- Information Governance & Policies
- Add-on modules

If your enterprise is considering becoming early adopter of a major hybrid deployment — and you care about providing an integrated user experience for your colleagues — then we recommend waiting to see how Redmond sorts this out (likely from the lessons of major customers who skin their knees).

1. Source: http://channel9.msdn.com/Events/TechEd/NewZealand/TechEd-New-Zealand-2012/OSP207

Technology

Technical Services	
Integration & Extensibility	
Application Development	
Administration and Management	
Architecture	
Cloud Services	
Security	

Integration

A SharePoint environment consists of several different Microsoft systems. The base systems underneath SharePoint 2013 remain unchanged:

- Windows Server
- Active Directory
- .NET Framework
- IIS & SQL Server

SharePoint 2013 maintains the concept of SharePoint Foundation, which is the "free" version. Foundation provides the plumbing components on which SharePoint Server functionality is built. The product takes advantage of mature SharePoint services in terms of version control, security, search, Web Parts (Microsoft-speak for portlets), and more. For workflow, SharePoint employs the underlying SharePoint Foundation and .NET workflow services.

Note that SharePoint still stores files natively in SQL Server (or alternatively in the "Remote Blog Storage" service, which is more of a framework than a feature). This makes them more conducive to indexing, but storing files in a relational database can affect performance. With 2013 comes "BLOB shredding" — where only the modifications get stored — but this is optimized for Office files, and it's not clear what performance gains will result. Remember that there is a 2 GB size limit per file.

At the base level, a SharePoint installation starts with the notions of "sites," which can be rolled up into "site collections." Site collections can be aggregated into "applications" within a "farm" (single instance of SharePoint), where other "shared services" may reside.

Sites can be made up of "lists" and "libraries," which aggregate different information elements that Microsoft calls "columns." "Content types" are another, more abstract way of combining columns into an organizational unit. Individual pages are typically comprised of one or (usually) more "Web Parts," which connect you to underlying content and services.

In SharePoint vernacular, "templates" and "site definitions" help you maintain models that can be cloned in new sites. A best practice is to deploy significant customizations or extensions as packaged "Solutions" — or (as of SP 2013) as "Apps."

The challenge for you is to understand these (sometimes-overlapping) terms and concepts, so that you can customize and troubleshoot effectively. Again, SharePoint is relatively easy to install, but by no means simple to master.

From a capacity standpoint, there's a general sense in the community that additional and richer services in SharePoint 2013 will require more servers and more storage. This is particularly the case since many of the newer social capabilities rely on MySites — a service some enterprises had turned off to reduce the amount of storage and sites in their farms.

The 2 GB size restriction on individual file sizes remains in SP 2013, and includes files you may store on disk (or elsewhere) via RBS. This will not present a problem if you only need to manage images or small audio and video files. However, if you need to manage something like

high-fidelity X-ray images, advanced CAD drawings, or full-length movies, you might hit a roadblock.

Tied to changes in both the SharePoint services architecture and improvements in overall content volume handling, SharePoint 2013 appears to be more scalable than 2010 was. However, Microsoft has also added complex new services (e.g., ubiquitous search) as well as extended the data model (e.g., the social data model). Additionally, you will want to gauge how "chatty" Office can become on your networks when tied to SharePoint.

Even more than SP 2010, with SP 2013 there are many key switches that need to be thrown at the beginning of an implementation, and you need to plan very carefully.

Integration and Extensibility

Because SharePoint is built using a .NET environment, then integration with other repositories and services should, in theory, be relatively straightforward. While integration is possible using the native repository API and the separately packaged Developer Studio, it will not always be a simple task. Theoretically, with the use of Web Services, you should be able to integrate with ERP and other Business Applications. However, system integrators tell us that this is neither an easy effort, nor is it a low-cost approach.

Business Connectivity Services (BCS) helps to expand your integration options. BCS is an umbrella term that includes everything related to integration — from presentation, to connectivity, to required tooling. Business Data Connectivity (BDC) provides the actual connectivity services. Note that BDC is a not a SharePoint service application, however.

Another integration option is to use Microsoft BizTalk Server, rather than SharePoint itself. BizTalk (which must be licensed separately) enables integration by exchanging business documents among applications, within or across organizational boundaries.

You'll find Web Parts galleries online as a central warehouse of Web Parts, and you can download a specific Web Part to create your custom SharePoint features and applications. Some of these are quite helpful for content and application integration. As always, the reliability and quality of these will vary. Like portlets in the Java world, you may sometimes see a messy commingling of presentation and business logic. Be sure to performance test any Web Part carefully (including those that you build yourself).

Application Development

You could think of SharePoint as a platform for building content applications in .NET. Since the product natively supports .NET and ASP.NET, you can embed other objects and services into your CMS using standard Microsoft tools and methodologies, and take advantage of specific .NET services. This is not simple, however, and the novice .NET developer can get (you) into deep trouble — very quickly.

For the developer, SharePoint itself offers a series of convenient constructs for grouping functionality together, including "features," "applications," "projects," "solutions," and now "apps." Understanding where one ends and the other begins becomes a big part of any broader design.

In SP 2013, Redmond added deployment services to manage code pushes. However, in larger enterprise projects, there are still challenges around configuration management or integration

with external configuration management systems. While many Java-based packages suffer from the same shortcoming, if you are writing a lot of code across multiple tiers, this may become a serious issue.

As mentioned earlier, SP 2013 brings the new "app" model, where you use JavaScript+HTML to create apps that live above SharePoint — albeit with access to SharePoint data and services — and they can interact with other systems without SharePoint's overhead.

Redmond is heavily promoting the app model, but it remains controversial. Some developers have complained about yet another approach, particularly one that does not feel tightly integrated with native SharePoint objects. Its heavy use of iframes for combining with SharePoint services on the glass is also controversial.

Other developers laud the of-SharePoint-but-not-in-SharePoint approach. It appears that a big driver for apps was the ability to enable cloud customers to deploy them to Office 365 — without significant server-side impact on the Microsoft hosting environment.

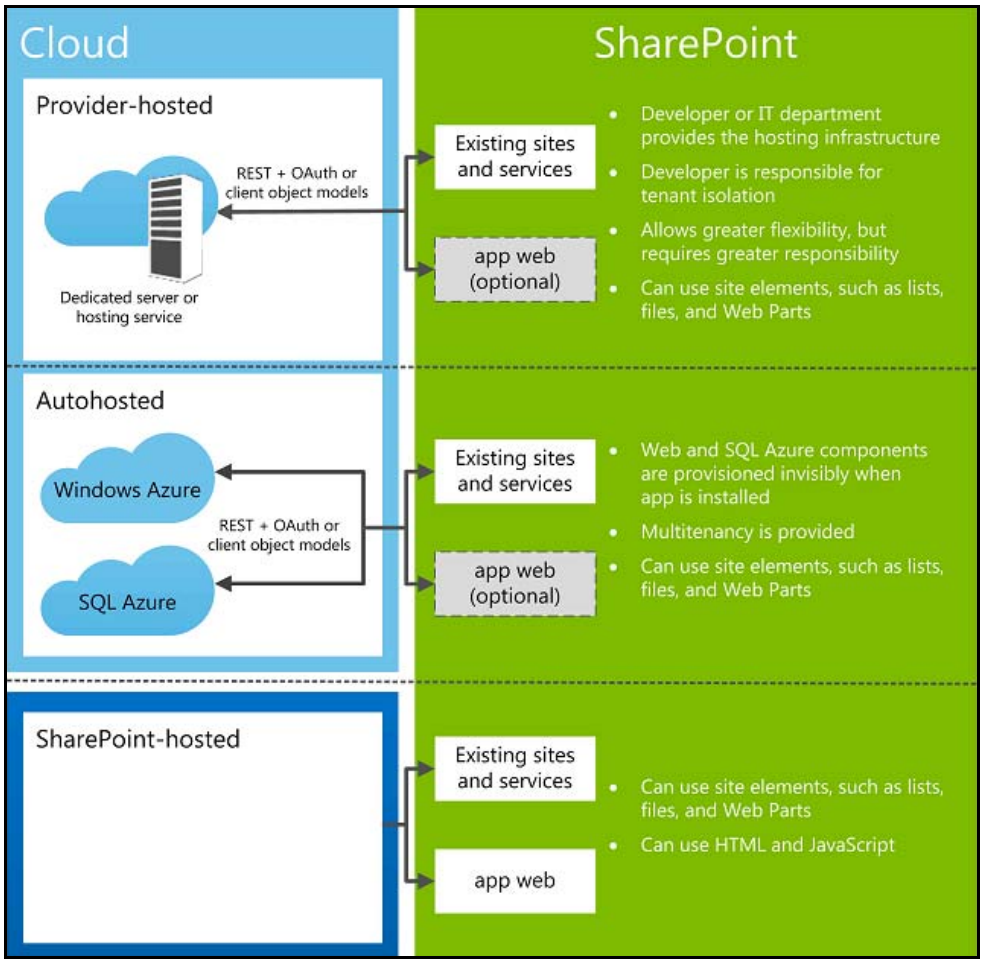


Figure 8. You have many different options for hosting apps including Azure, but the uptake on this approach was slow as of mid-2013. Source: Microsoft.

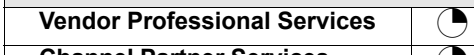
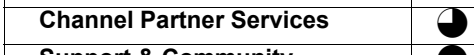
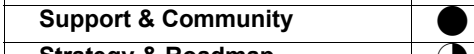
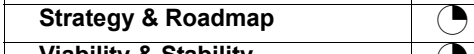
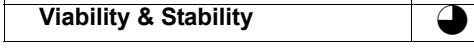
Overall, SharePoint brooks a comparatively high developer learning curve once you get beyond simple configurations. For advice, developers must depend on a heterogeneous

panoply of websites, books, bloggers, and search engines to find useful information. Microsoft neither organizes nor certifies the results from vast experimentation in the field in any meaningful way.

Security

For authentication, the product is unusually flexible. In addition to Active Directory (AD), it will also support LDAP, or any other ASP.NET-supported role provider. If you do not employ AD, however, your users can no longer access SharePoint directly from within Office. Microsoft fixed a long-standing problem in previous versions of SharePoint by enabling document-level security. Now you can give a set of permissions to users and groups for everything up to item level, including site, folder, document, list, or library.

Vendor Intangibles

Intangibles	
Vendor Professional Services	
Channel Partner Services	
Support & Community	
Strategy & Roadmap	
Viability & Stability	

For support, a key consideration is remembering all of the details and nuances of SharePoint. In reality, there is an excess of unique details and quirks that ship with SharePoint. You'll want to keep your own FAQ handy, running lists of bugs, running lists of fixes, oddities, and end-user instructions. Getting organized from the beginning of the project will help down the road.

Fortunately, finding good resources on the web should be relatively easy. There is a surfeit of bloggers and forums — inside Microsoft and out — willing to explore the innards of SharePoint with you in a way that you would never find with EMC's Documentum, for example. The only potential problem here is that most SharePoint specialists tend to be more up-to-speed on the portal and collaboration aspects of the platform, and less conversant in its other capabilities — particularly things that have radically changed in SP 2013, like search.

Anyone can download a trial copy of SharePoint and install and configure it for their own environment; few other document management vendors will let you do that.

Strategy & Roadmap

The strategy for SharePoint is fairly clear and well defined in that Microsoft has recognized that the huge volume of files its Office tools produced each day need to be managed. It is somewhat ironic that the firm largely responsible for the electronic document chaos that we see in most enterprises is now the firm asking to be trusted to sort-out the mess (for a price!).

There is pragmatism in the product's strategy that we didn't expect to see ten years ago from the same firm. SharePoint Foundation is the platform, and Microsoft obviously wants massive market share with this product layer. Yet at the same time, Microsoft recognizes that the services they can offer on top of this basic layer will only be a part of the story. Microsoft depends on a huge channel of small development firms and consultancies to take their products to market, so Microsoft treads a thin line between alienating this channel and developing the out-of-the-box components that customers expect.

Services & Channels

To date, it appears Redmond has catered to its consulting channel base — which in turn has embraced SharePoint enthusiastically — perhaps at the expense of the company's end-user customers, many of whom have been surprised by the complexity of the platform.

There is probably no vendor that has a larger channel to market than Microsoft — and SharePoint has been much hyped, so the number of systems integrators in the field willing to deploy and further develop this product set is larger than perhaps any vendor in this report.

The challenge for prospective licensees will be finding solid, experienced integrators, since Redmond's channel tends to emphasize smaller consultancies that may not have broad experience in SharePoint, though there are plenty of larger partners as well. This is not a simple product, and the depth of expertise will likely remain shallow. Even if you have strong .NET talent in-house, you should consider aligning with a consultancy that has gotten inside of SharePoint and can help you avoid specific pitfalls.

Integration & Partnerships

Microsoft excels at building technology partnerships, and many other software vendors are joining the SharePoint bandwagon. In the web space, third-party developers are creating e-learning modules and taxonomy management tools. OpenText, Documentum, and other vendors are collaborating with Microsoft to enable customers to use SharePoint as the front-end to their repositories. Even other Web CMS vendors — with encouragement from Microsoft's international offices in particular — are building connectors to the SharePoint document repository.

Thus, if you already license a document management tool, you may have new choices about the business user experience to present to your colleagues. For collaboration scenarios, SharePoint may be more attractive than your incumbent document management tool is. However, an important issue here is Microsoft's tendency to turn to third-party developers for fixes or enhancements for things like compliance, accessibility, globalization, hierarchical taxonomies, and standard URLs. This is helpful because it takes advantage of the dynamism of the ecosystem, but still it leaves customers exposed if Redmond develops a product to address these shortcomings.

Viability & Stability

As a product set and as a company, it might seem that there is little to discuss around viability and stability. Microsoft is a blue chip company, and if they fall, many will fall with them. Likewise, SharePoint will be around for a long time to come, there is already an enormous user base out there, and the demand for these services is likely to grow. In addition, the sheer enormity of the SharePoint footprint will appeal to VARs and the underlying Windows SharePoint Services will quickly become a popular platform for delivering content-rich applications.

Licensing

SharePoint pricing is a bit complicated, but (to its credit) Microsoft is very open about it. The on-premise version comes in three editions: Foundation, Standard, and Enterprise. Licensing is further complicated due to a combination of licensing types (server or client access licenses), and whether you buy software support.

Behind the firewall (i.e., for an intranet), SharePoint sells a combination of server and client access licenses ("CALs"), listing at about $4,000/server, and about $100/seat per user or device. The CALs come in two versions: Standard and Enterprise. Most larger enterprises will want the Enterprise version. Note that you purchase the Enterprise CAL on top of the Standard CAL, and you have to purchase the Enterprise edition for everyone, not just a small, privileged group.

With SP 2013, Microsoft helpfully does not apply different licensing for external-facing sites. Additionally, the FAST-ish search service is now included. However, you must apply full licenses to any staging environments. Development environments must use MSDN licensing.

You must apply full licenses to any failover or staging environments (but not dev; that's handled by MSDN licensing). Plan infrastructure very carefully; SP 2013 is considered more hardware intensive than its predecessors were.

For SharePoint Online, the licensing is similarly variable. For SharePoint alone, licensing ranges from $3-$7/month/employee, but there are volume discounts and additional savings if you license multiple Office 365 services. Note that the cloud version of SharePoint may bring other costs to your enterprise, including bandwidth and potentially VPN connections.

As mentioned throughout this report, you need to be aware that Microsoft SharePoint may not suffice, and additional products from third-party vendors, as well as corresponding services will affect total costs. Also note that many advanced SharePoint activities require other Microsoft products to function properly (including, for example, users to be upgraded to Office 2010). Again, these will need to be factored into the total cost of a SharePoint deployment.

Conclusion

Basic file sharing collaboration at the workgroup level remains SharePoint's biggest strength. It boasts tight integration with MS Office, a broad and increasingly deep feature set, with decent customization facilities and comparatively good information management services. Document sharing is the hallmark of most team-based environments; as such, SharePoint is particularly well suited to departmental scenarios.

SharePoint's biggest shortcoming as an ECM platform is that, well, it's a platform. With enough time, money, and painkillers, you can develop business-friendly applications with it, but at that point, you are wading into the same deep pool as IBM, Oracle, and EMC — i.e., the pains of a heavily customized system.

On the plus side, bevies of Microsoft consulting and software partners are prepared to sell you various software modules to compensate for the product's native shortcomings. Budget your time and finances accordingly.

If you have hands-on experience with this product and wish to share your feedback, please write to us at feedback@realstorygroup.com. All customer input is kept confidential.

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Michael Sampson
President, The Michael Sampson Company Ltd

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