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SharePoint Comparison

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Not long ago I mused on the possibilites of Open Source, and yes, I took a swipe at Microsoft, but I'm a great believer in the right tool for the job, and as such, if you want an out-of-the-box jack of all trades (intranet, enterprise content management and web content management), then without a doubt, I'm a staunch advocate of Microsoft Office SharePoint Server (also known as SharePoint or MOSS). MOSS is the missing link between Microsoft Server products and the Microsoft Office suite.

I must make the point that this article concerns MOSS 2007 (with the 'for Internet' licence), not Microsoft Windows SharePoint Services (WSS). Whilst it is true that both can rightly be called 'SharePoint', it can cause confusion during discussion if one person is talking about MOSS and the other about WSS. In fact, as is usually the case with Microsoft, there are different editions of SharePoint. Generally speaking you will probably have WSS already available to you if you have a fairly recent edition of Windows Server, and you may well be already able to create an intranet using WSS. MOSS extends the features of WSS so that you are able to build an intranet and extranet as well as multiple public facing web sites and connect to any existing business applications you have.

MOSS is specifically designed to help and encourage teams of people to communicate, collaborate, share work and ideas and engage in ongoing dialogue. If you already use Microsoft Servers and Microsoft Office, a nd you are in the market for a hybrid collaboration tool, document management, intranet and web content management system, you would be hard pressed to find a solution that is as comprehensive as MOSS **and** in the same price bracket. Last year (2008) I was asked to compare MOSS to other products on the market and measure it up according to particular requirements. There are few places where I could find a side-by-side analysis of MOSS against any other solutions with the same sort of feature set, so I had to go about creating my own which I've re-produced below. You should be aware that the table below was created specifically to list the features required by a particular organisation, so that constrained the features I was looking at.

The solutions other than MOSS listed below may well have certain specialised features which you might consider to more closely meet your own requirements, but I think MOSS is a great solution for probably the majority of organisations who already use Microsoft products and who have no extra-ordinary requirements or who are constrained by a down-to-earth budget.

Feature	MS SharePoint (MOSS 2007)	Hyperoffice	IBM Workplace Collaboration Services	SAP Netweaver	Vignette Collaboration
Can it be hosted internally?	Yes - Windows Server	No - Hosted Externally	Yes – Windows Server + SQL Server	Yes – Windows Server + SQL Server	Yes – Windows Server + SQL Server
Supported Browsers / Platforms	Firefox 1.0, Mozilla, Netscsape Navigator, Safari Windows, Mac OSX, Linux	Firefox, Safari Windows, Mac OS, Linux	Optional "Activity Explorer" client, Mozilla 1.4, Firefox 1.0, Netscape 8.2 (very limited functions on Mac) Windows, Mac OS8, Linux	gt;IE, Firefox 1.0, "duet" Office integration software Windows only-tightly integrated with MS .Net2.0 framework	IE, Firefox
Recommended Browser / Platform	IE6+ Windows	IE5+ WIndows	Sun Java Virtual Machine is required for full functionality. Can only be view "shared screens" with IE5.5 or 6	N/A	N/A
Integration with existing business applications?	Yes – "business Data Catalogue" which requires no coding, or an Access database could be used to query business applications and results viewed within SharePoint	No	Yes:- Requires customisation by specialists	Yes:- Requires customisation by specialists	Yes:- Requires customisation by specialists
Inventory Management System Available	Yes:- Free template can be installed by administrator	No	Would require additional bespoke tailoring of system to meet requirements	Would require additional bespoke tailoring of system to meet requirements	Would require additional bespoke tailoring of system to meet requirements
Room Booking System Available	Yes:- Free template can be installed by administrator	No	Would require additional bespoke tailoring of system to meet requirements	Would require additional bespoke tailoring of system to meet requirements	Would require additional bespoke tailoring of system to meet requirements
Holiday Management System	Yes:- Free template can be installed by administrator	No	Would require additional bespoke tailoring of system to meet requirements	Would require additional bespoke tailoring of system to meet requirements	Would require additional bespoke tailoring of system to meet requirements

Feature					
Web-site Content Management	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes, Intranet Extranet only. Integrating with separate product "Vignette Content Management" allows corporate web content management
Offline Access	Yes:- through Office 2003 and 2007 and through free Colligo Reader. Special mobile pages for devices such as Blackberries	Yes:- Special mobile pages for devices such as Blackberries	Yes:- Via additional "rich client" Called "Activity Explorer" allows locally held and encrypted data stores	Yes:- With "Duet" embedded into MS office 2003/2007	Yes:- Via e-mail clients. No special mobile pages
Shared Calendar	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shared Tasks	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shared Contacts	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Document Storage	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Document Version Control	Yes	Yes	Yes	No:- Can integrate with Open Text	Yes
Search Facility	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personalised Home Page for Users	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Automatically notify users of changes to documents / tasks/ events	Yes	No	Yes:- Notifications sent when users are added or removed from meetings or workspaces, or when they are assigned or change a task	Alert options are available. These are like normal e-mails.	Users can subscribe to RSS feeds which they must proactively view to see any changes to documents, etc.
Blackberry e-mails	Yes:- Normal e-mails	Yes:- Normal e-mails	Yes:- Normal e-mails	???	No:- e-mails not sent
Workflow Management	Yes	Yes	Yes:- Via optional "rich client" called "Activity Explorer"	Yes	Yes
Project Management	Yes :- through additional Team Direction product	Yes	Yes:- Via optional "rich client" called "Activity Explorer"	Yes:- Through additional "SAP Professional Services"	Yes:- By integrating with MS Project Server

Team Workspaces	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes:- called "Virtual Rooms"	Yes
Wikis	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes:- Through optional 3rd party product supplied by HLP	Yes
Blogs	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Who supports it? (Technical Support or Integration Products)	Microsoft .NET development community and 3rd party organisations such as Colligo and Open Text	Hyperoffice.com	IBM, 3rd party organisations	SAP 3rd party organisations, Microsoft partner SAP to supply Duet software, Open Text supplies Document version control	Vignette
Costs	There are large variations in cost between these products. Do check directly with the producer for prices or suppliers, and where possible get several quotes. Also, don't forget to ask for educational or charity discounts if you think you may qualify for them.				

Perhaps one of the greatest things about MOSS is that it enables your enterprise to put everything in one place. MOSS is a single system with a single web based interface through which teams can pool all kinds of resources, plan meetings, connect to corporate data in other systems, set up e-mail alerts to let them know when important documents have been changed. There is no need to log in to multiple systems for different things, a well-oiled organisation can set up SharePoint as a window into almost everything that team members need to be productive. Couple this with the integration SharePoint has with the Microsoft Office suite of products and the security features of the Microsoft network you are probably running on and a compelling case is formed for seeing things The Microsoft Way.

Other powerful features include offline access to files (in effect, you can download files, go offline to change them, and when you go back online the files can be synchronised back into MOSS), and a set of 40 basic application templates (vacation management, room booking, inventory tracking, help desk system!) to get you up and running with an intranet with a real minimum of fuss - and the application templates work with the basic Windows SharePoint Services.

If all that isn't good enough to get you drooling you can actually build your own applications within MOSS, so you can get the best of both worlds - a system that is cost effective and relatively quick to install and get used to, but one which can grow and evolve with the needs of your company if you need to develop something bespoke. It isn't by any means Open Source, but you are able to tinker with MOSS to a very sophisticated degree by building your own applications into it. SharePoint offers a great framework to get you up and running with a wide range of standard tools, so you can concentrate your time and resources on tailoring it to any specific requirements rather than building something from scratch.

It's not often I'll sing the praises of Microsoft, and I'm sure I haven't covered the half of it in this post, but with MOSS, Microsoft really have hit the jackpot - especially if you consider that much of the functionality is already built into a server system that you may already own in the form of Windows SharePoint Services. I must stress again that this is not an exhaustive comparison of *all* the features available in SharePoint, against *all* the features of the other systems. Additionally, this table was compiled some time ago and it is likely that some of the features listed above will have changed or been improved, or possibly even deprecated.

I'd advise that if you are looking into the various editions of SharePoint that you do some detailed analysis of how it suits your particular business needs. Create a 'wish list' of features and then compare that wish list with what is available on the market, ideally, create a table (or 'matrix' if you want to get all sophisticated) like the one above and compare and contrast the available features, you should find that this helps make the decision easier to take.