EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Presently, Microsoft is heavily promoting SharePoint as a collaboration hub for a wide range of companies. At the same time, a number of the product’s technological features and its value proposition make it a rather uncomfortable choice for small and medium-sized organizations. These incongruities are most pronounced in the areas of total cost of ownership, project implementation time, dependence on the Windows platform and difficulties in deployment, maintenance and management. However, businesses shouldn’t abandon the obvious advantages of collaborative technologies. The best option in many cases is identifying an alternative to SharePoint that addresses SMB business requirements. Bitrix Intranet is a good example and is currently being used by more than a thousand small organizations worldwide.
SHAREPOINT’S SMB PITFALLS

Microsoft’s aggressive promotional campaign has positioned SharePoint as a premier platform for collaboration to improve internal productivity, efficiency and agility. Despite the buzz around the recent launch of the latest version of the product, it is still quite a nuisance for small and medium-sized organizations in terms of cost, complexity and the array of features needed to cover the spectrum of their needs for creating an effective internal workspace. The other side of the story is that SharePoint overshadows the market, preventing alternative, SMB-focused solutions from finding their customers. Naturally this state of affairs holds the market back as organizations adopt scattered, single-task-oriented products lacking centralized administration, cross-application integration and comprehensive functionality. Worse, companies may decide to stand pat, keeping legacy technologies running as long as possible, resulting in poor business performance and minimal internal transparency.

Primarily developed for large organizations, SharePoint possesses a number of qualities that equate to shortcomings from the viewpoint of SMBs. What are the most crucial technological and business drawbacks of this platform that prevent SharePoint’s wide adoption in this market segment?

License and Additional Software Costs

One may argue that SharePoint doesn’t require any additional spending as it comes free with the purchase of Windows Server. This is a very misleading statement that can have serious repercussions if taken at face value.

In fact, Microsoft supplies two versions of SharePoint which have greatly different functionality.

Walking a Slippery Slope

Windows SharePoint Services (WSS) comes with Windows Server and lacks core collaboration functionality like enterprise search, personal profiles, social networking, forms, and workflow management. This significantly downgrades the product’s utility and basically transforms it into a simple data silo.

The flavor of MOSS

On the other hand there is Microsoft SharePoint Server (MOSS), which is sold separately with some assembly required and imposes major supporting software acquisitions. The first trial of the prospective MOSS customer is to get through the licensing policy and select the proper MOSS flavor. To purchase, customers must take into consideration the product’s server licenses, client access licenses (CALs) and additional plug-ins and connectors like Office Forms Server, MOSS for Internet Server or Windows External Connector. Depending on the choices made, a MOSS license can cost from $46,000 to $95,000 for an organization of 200 users1.
Choosing a Cost-Effective SharePoint Alternative for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses

This is only the tip of the iceberg. MOSS also requires the purchase of Windows Server (both server and client access) and SQL Server licenses that nearly double the software acquisition costs. Consideration must also be made for third-party software for important security features like web antivirus, one-time passwords, integrity checker and backup.

Implementation and Maintenance Costs

Implementation of MOSS is a resource intensive process that requires the involvement of third-party installers and consultants. Moreover, implementation is not a simply the deployment of the software. It also implies comprehensive conceptual design of the system and requires a clear understanding of the business requirements for the foreseeable future. These requirements are then translated into certain functionality, while development of additional features will again require third-party involvement.

As a result, MOSS implementation is most easily measured in months and can easily turn into a never ending story. Even large enterprises possessing dedicated business analysts and a highly capable IT workforce can find it difficult to define their requirements. For smaller organizations, this process is even more risky and may end up as an ever-growing expense with a little business outcome but a continuous need for more development.

MOSS maintenance is another side of the story. Normally it requires a dedicated engineer or an external specialist to ensure the system’s performance and upkeep along with the development of new functions and features. The consequence is that the system’s total cost of ownership may experience tremendous growth and bring the organization a number of unpleasant surprises.

Functions and Features

MOSS is a collaboration platform that indeed can satisfy even the most hard-to-please customer willing and able to invest the necessary monetary and human capital. However, there are at least two serious shortcomings in functions and features that complicate the product’s wide adoption in SMB.

Firstly, out-of-the-box functionality. MOSS is basically a construction set that allows the assembly of a collaboration platform. The contacts, calendars, tasks and data storages installed by default are notable for their lack of usability, inter-connectivity and features. This sharply contradicts the needs of small and medium-sized businesses, which want a ready-to-go business tool and vastly prefer to choose among options than to start from scratch. Confirmation of this can be found in a recent study that revealed that 93% of SMB customers who purchased an alternative to SharePoint and were satisfied
Choosing a Cost-Effective SharePoint Alternative for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses

with the pre-set functionality and portal structure. The difference is like that between a university exam requiring writing a long essay (MOSS) and a standardized multiple choice test (SMB-oriented alternative).

Secondly, MOSS doesn’t cover the whole range of customer requirements for creating effective internal workspaces. The product’s collaboration features are sufficient, but communications are left out of the equation. If a customer wants instant messaging, email, or video conferencing, they are going to be met with another invoice – this time for Microsoft Lync and Microsoft Exchange.

Security

Technologically speaking, MOSS is a web application that allows the building of websites, intranets and extranets. Despite certain access restrictions, this is still an application facing the hostile environment of the Internet and vulnerable to a wide range of attacks. Reckless MOSS deployment may entail significant security risks and result in leakage and loss of confidential data, service unavailability, damage to reputation, and failure to comply with national or international regulations.

MOSS relies on built-in Windows security. However, to avoid security risks and guarantee sustainable operation, the product should be reinforced with additional technologies that Windows lacks. For example, a Web Application Firewall to check incoming requests and prevent hacker attacks like SQL Injection, Cross-Site Scripting or CSRF. Furthermore, one-time passwords provide unbeatable protection against password hijacking; web anti-virus prevents proliferation of web-borne malware among employees; and an integrity checker tracks unauthorized changes to the system. All of these can be added to MOSS, but entail additional time and expense.

Even a small organization will find it necessary to make some investment in third-party security software and additional services to ensure that the security framework is properly implemented and maintained.

Technical Support

Microsoft doesn’t provide technical support for MOSS customers. Alternatively, they can purchase this service from Microsoft partners for additional cost that, again, increases the solution’s total cost of ownership and complicates even simple things related to managing the collaboration platform. Moreover, there are a lot of complaints about the quality of the support – a recent InfoTech survey reveals that 25% of respondents are unhappy with the service they receive.

From the Gartner Information Security Summit on SharePoint Security

«Survey finds that Microsoft’s SharePoint support is rubbish»
Platform Dependence

With MOSS, organizations are forced to adopt a whole range of Microsoft technology and have limited opportunities to switch to alternative solutions, especially free open source products. Naturally, customers become the hostages of a single vendor and are compelled to continue using the platform regardless of whether they really like it or not. The cost of migrating can be a real constraint even if the organization sees obvious business benefits in an alternative solution. Moreover, upgrading MOSS may require upgrading the other parts of the Microsoft platform to assure system compatibility, fault-tolerance and to enable the latest features.

Product Ownership and Openness

MOSS is a traditional, proprietary software product that doesn’t provide source code. While some organizations may find that to be a common practice, but this peculiarity contains a number of rocks below the surface.

First of all, possession of the source code makes the customer the real owner of the product. It safeguards the business against unwanted moves by the vendor or any sort of market fluctuations that may result in the product unavailability, licensing policy or functionality changes.

The availability of the source code also allows comprehensive product auditing, easily integration with legacy business applications, development of custom functionality and greater effectiveness of patch management to cope with specific security threats, including zero-day attacks. As a result, organizations receive much more flexibility in product management and confidence as the real owners of the product.

Usability

Usability is another weak point of MOSS. For various reasons, the interface confuses many users trying to perform even simple actions, leading to low adoption rates. The weak point here is again Microsoft’s striving to incorporate everything into one huge package and leaving customers to tailor the solution to their own requirements or to try to find their way to the right feature. The ribbon-based user interface, shortcuts and extensive documentation don’t solve the issue. The multiple options for basic operations like storing documents complicate the process of locating the proper tool and in most cases require expert advice to achieve adequate results. For example, to set up a team workspace properly, an experienced SharePoint specialist possessing extensive knowledge is required to juggle the various web-based components, configure views for document libraries and other content or make new content appear dynamically on the team’s home page, etc.
Performance

MOSS performance has been a hot topic since the product’s introduction back in 2001. It initiated lots of discussion in dedicated forums and Microsoft events. Numerous MOSS experts and software vendors currently offer their products and services to fine tune SharePoint settings and increase performance.

The problem is not merely heavy hardware requirements, but the necessity to optimize the MOSS environment – including Microsoft IIS and Microsoft SQL Server. Again, attaining an acceptable level of performance of the collaboration platform requires extra expenses and third-party advice.

A REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE

Naturally, MOSS was developed for large enterprises and doesn’t really fit specific SMB requirements in the many aspects mentioned above.

However, instead of trying to get a quart into a pint jar, organizations can switch their attention to alternative solutions that were developed with SMB needs in mind. SharePoint is far from being the only choice on the market as a number of noteworthy products that fit specific requirements in functionality and price are available. A good example is Bitrix Intranet – a highly-secure, out-of-the-box solution designed for internal collaboration and communication.

Let’s concentrate on how Bitrix Intranet (BIP) performs in areas that are the most glaring weaknesses for SharePoint from the viewpoint of SMBs.

BIP effectively addresses the strict budget limitations inherent in smaller organizations. The product price starts at $1,799 and a company of 100 users can purchase a fully-functional collaboration and communication system for $4,799. BIP doesn’t impose mandatory purchases of additional software. It runs on both Windows and Linux/Unix platforms and can leverage the advantages of free open source products. Thanks to support of a wide range of virtualization environments (including VMware and Virtuozzo), BIP can share the same physical server with other software (like an e-mail server), allowing customers to save on hardware expenses.

BIP features a pre-set intranet structure, ready-made collaboration and communication tools, an intuitive interface, and doesn’t require the constant attention of an IT engineer, significant implementation expenses or staff training. As a result, the solution is distinguished by much more attractive key financial indicators. For example, the 3-year cumulative TCO for an organization of 100 employees is only $394 per user and the organization...
Choosing a Cost-Effective SharePoint Alternative for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses

can return its investment in only one year if a user saves some 1.4 min per day through the benefits of the improved internal workspace.

BIP is currently used by more than a thousand SMB organizations worldwide. Most of them opted for the product because of its wide spectrum of ready functionality covering these companies’ business-driven requirements. It contains extensive collaboration (internal and external workgroups, contacts, shared files, private and public calendars, workflow and task management, e-learning, helpdesk), communication (instant messaging, channeled notifications, video conferencing, e-mail processing and archiving) and social networking (discussion forums, blogs, comments, personal dashboards, RSS feeds, polls & surveys, multimedia galleries and company news) features. Importantly, these features are ready-to-go and don’t require further development. At the same time, BIP provides tight integration with Microsoft Office and allows synchronization of contacts, calendars and tasks with Outlook (no Microsoft Exchange is required) and editing of shared files in Word, Excel and PowerPoint with WebDAV support.

This rich functionality is wrapped in robust security framework and intuitive interface much like a contemporary web 2.0-enabled website, with easy access to core features, online help and ready-made online training courses.

The product’s integration capabilities are extended with the availability of well-documented API and source code. Content editors and contributors can perform their work through the front end using the WYSIWYG editor, adding pages, menu items, news, and virtually any other form of content. Administrators in turn can configure security settings, analyze user activity, and import and export data, and perform other administrative tasks in the easy-to-manage backend without coding skills.

Being a native PHP application, BIP supports both Windows and Linux/Unix environments and doesn’t impose any platform restrictions. The product can easily be migrated to any of the mentioned operating systems and adapted to the organization’s IT policy.

Performance is another strong point of BIP. The product is based on the Bitrix platform, which is capable of serving up to four million unique visitors per day with modest hardware. The integrated performance monitor delivers real-time advice for product optimization that doesn’t require an in-depth knowledge or third-party advice.

BIP customers are entitled to highly-qualified technical support, which is included in the product price. Free software updates and upgrades are part of the service and available through automatic click-away downloads upon the release of each new version of BIP.
CONCLUSION

Microsoft did a great job promoting SharePoint to the market with the single exception that it was a bad turn for the product and the company (and the market) when MOSS was heavily positioned as a universal collaboration hub for a wide range of organizations. In fact, the product is suitable only for large enterprises that possess impressive IT budgets, have the time and expertise to define specific functionality requirements, and qualified personnel capable of developing and maintaining the platform. Thus, MOSS got covered by an overgrown marketing image, which lead to frequent implementation failure among small and medium-sized businesses who found themselves in a looping development cycle or experiencing difficulties in getting the anticipated benefits of the product.

However, smaller organizations should by no means abandon their ambitions to improve internal collaboration and communications. With a number of SharePoint alternatives available on the market, companies are recommended to have a closer look at Bitrix Intranet, which was developed specifically to fit SMB needs. The solution can usually be launched in twelve working hours or less, provides rich out-of-the-box functionality, and doesn’t require in-depth knowledge for maintenance. Wrapped in a robust security framework, it is ready to cope with the ever-growing number of security threats. Critically for the SMB segment, the product comes with high-quality technical support and includes updates and upgrades. To make the point as briefly as possible, companies get more functionality for less money with shorter lead times. That is something what small and medium-sized businesses are looking for.
### ADDENDUM

**Bitrix Intranet – SharePoint Feature Comparison Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Microsoft Office SharePoint Server</th>
<th>Bitrix Intranet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal communications</td>
<td>🌟🌟🌟</td>
<td>🌟🌟🌟</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social networking</td>
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<td>Performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source code</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>System requirements</td>
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<td>🌟🌟🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software cost / 100 users</td>
<td>$25,537*</td>
<td>$4,799**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* MOSS Standard
** Bitrix Intranet / BizPace Edition
ABOUT BITRIX

Bitrix is a privately-owned company developing an advanced business communications platform to bridge SMBs with their customers (Internet), partners (Extranet) and employees (Intranet).

Founded in 1998 and located in Alexandria, VA, Bitrix now incorporates 90+ staff, 40,000+ customers and 4,000+ partners worldwide. The customer list includes Hyundai, Volkswagen, Panasonic, Gazprom, Xerox, PricewaterhouseCoopers, DPD, VTB, Samsung and Cosmopolitan. Localized into 13 languages, the company’s products are distinguished for their pioneering technology, unique security features, extreme performance capacity and unmatched ease-of-use.

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