# Microsoft SharePoint 2010 for Your Business

By Sven Homan

This article provides a brief introduction and overview of what business of any size can do with the latest version of the popular software tool named SharePoint.

SharePoint is a Swiss-army knife of office organization, collaboration, and management. It extends the desktop Office software suite of products in ways that few can imagine until they can see it and try it. Office can be a single departmental office or in broader view, the entire business or enterprise.

**Most Popular Features**

Digital documents creation, distribution, and storage. Multiple users can jointly create, push through approval process, store, and distribute any Word, PowerPoint, Excel or other digitally created document by using straightforward and simple to use SharePoint tools.

Users can create and share individual as well as joint calendars and schedules that come from multiple sources such as Outlook, Gmail, and other.

Lists of virtually anything digital can be created, organized, and shared whether be a list of documents, records, company event participants, or other.

Departments can create their own intranets and share relevant information with the entire company. Human resource policies and services for example can not only be listed but also provided and managed inside the SharePoint environment.

Departments and individuals can collect information using built in support for InfoPath data collection forms.

Small applications can be built for just about anything imaginable by knowing only basic SharePoint configuration tools. If you need an app for tracking cell-phone or other equipment rentals in a company, there is an app for that. If you need a simple departmental inventory management tool there is one for that. If you want a shareable tool for managing your softball league, there is an app for that too. Often such apps are not on the market, are too expensive for intended light use, or may require serious independent maintenance by an IT department.

SharePoint is extensible in many ways and many professional applications are available as simple plugins. Help desk and even entire CRM systems are available for SharePoint at a fraction of the cost of standalone systems.

SharePoint is a true hub for the enterprise. Various reports connected to data from other company systems can be easily shared via SharePoint in a secure and permission based environment.

Everything stored in SharePoint is searchable. If properly configured, employees of any size company can find just about anything ever published or created by a company in few clicks of a button.

**Versions and Licensing**

SharePoint comes in two versions: Foundations and Server. Foundation is available as a free extension to Windows server. Server version comes with a general and per user based licensing fees.

Foundation, even though it is free, is a powerful tool and is not only a teaser to entice you to buy the Server version. You may however do just that once you get a taste of it. Foundation is a seriously capable product in its own right and is also slightly easier to use than its heavyweight brother. Server on the other hand, comes with powerful data integrations to other company systems, powerful search features, and some other enterprise necessities. Each business needs to evaluate its own needs, price, maintenance requirements, and software versions capabilities.

**Deployment**

Deployment options vary from onsite installation where you do your own management of software and hardware to rentals where the hosting company takes care of all backups, availability, and routine maintenance tasks. Usually, it is the bigger companies with extensive IT resources, which decide to do their own deployment and maintenance,

**Training**

There are many resources from which users can learn how to make the best use of SharePoint once it is installed in the business environment. Books, self-learning DVDs, tutorials, experimentation, consultants, etc... There are also courses available for users, power users, administrators, and developers. These can be taken online, or the trainers will come to your company, or the employees will go to an outside training location. There are pros and cons to every approach and modality. Where a book may be inexpensive, it can leave you with many unanswered questions beyond the most obvious tasks. Live instructor can however tailor the course to you specific company needs and answer questions that you may otherwise have hard time finding the answers or may pay heavily to business consultants. For many, a DVD is a good learning approach where learning can be done at for learner convenient times. Other, they need information fast and hit the ground running, and that is something only a good instructor lead training course will provide.

**Conclusion**

No doubt, SharePoint 2010 is an awesome business tool that keeps getting better and better with each incarnation. Whether you just want to store and share documents, collect employee information with forms, or collaborate with employees and partners across the globe, SharePoint has an out-of –the-box tool for it. With virtually 100% of businesses using Microsoft Office, it is only natural that it is integrated and enhanced with use of a SharePoint in order to maximize business investment in the existing software and skills. And with the available free version of SharePoint Foundation, it is quite hard to imagine why anyone would not want to deploy and use SharePoint in their business.

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