Comparison of SharePoint and Sitecore Web Content Management Platforms

Introduction

This document presents a comparison of SharePoint Server 2010 as a content management system to Sitecore's Web Content Management (WCM) system, Digital Marketing System (DMS), and Customer Engagement Platform (CEP).

At a high level, SharePoint is a tool for intranet portals, collaboration and records management. SharePoint is very good at document collaboration, team workspaces, and workflow with specific access control to each site. This is also known as Enterprise Content Management (ECM). SharePoint 2010 has a built in WCM and is a vast improvement to SharePoint 2007's WCM capabilities.

Selection factors that one should include when choosing a WCM system are: Ease of implementation and maintenance, technical platform, design flexibility of the platform, ease of content re-use, multi-lingual and multi device support, SEO and marketing support, developer community/social support for the platform, usability for content authors, competency of content authors and budget.

Sitecore is a web content management system (WCM) and its primary focus is enabling easy content production by non-technical users. A non-technical person with experience in word processor or text editor will find navigating to the content publishing module or editing content in Sitecore to be second nature. Sitecore is built for highly controlled publishing, structured content and pixel perfect branding.

SharePoint vs. Sitecore as WCM

Implementation, Maintenance and Support

Sitecore is an ASP .Net web application, providing a familiar development interface to more-readily available .Net developers. SharePoint is a platform on top of ASP .Net with its own development and hosting environment.

Developers need to understand SharePoint as a platform and also have experience in implementing content management systems.

SharePoint setup and maintenance requires oversight from IT Department. SharePoint upgrades are much more complex than for a typical content management system and require careful planning by IT department, developers and management. Sitecore is geared more towards developers. Upgrades are done by developers with light supervision from IT for deployment.

It is to be noted that the effort and tasks required for managing a public-facing Web farm and environment is much more challenging than for internal platform. Sitecore WCM is built for internet sites and is

essentially an asp.net website. SharePoint WCM is a platform with lot more features suited towards internal ECM.

Typically in a WCM (CMS) solution like Sitecore, the maintenance and support plans will provide premium help and troubleshooting for the custom WCM solution built on top of the out of the box framework. Microsoft support for SharePoint WCM is limited to core parts used to build the solution but they will not be able to support customization.

Content reuse and design flexibility

All elements in SharePoint are based on "lists". Reuse of content in SharePoint is managed through reusable content lists. To reuse content, for example, if you need a community details page that has a web and print rendering, in SharePoint you would need to create multiple "reusable content" type fields (text/html), then ensure they are auto updateable and then use that on a page layout. A lot of design planning is required to ensure flexible content reuse. With Sitecore, content is always separated from layout and you'd enter the information only once on a community layout and reuse it in multiple templates. WCM system like Sitecore also allows you to query on the content types so that only certain field content can be reused on a template. In terms of flexibility, for example if you need to switch the html editor in Sitecore or add custom functionality such as YouTube picker, this can easily done as there are free Sitecore plugins that allow you do so. There is no straightforward way to customize or switch the html editor in SharePoint.

Support for multiple languages and devices

SharePoint supports multiple languages by "Site Variations". This means that for each language implements a copy of your site. Sitecore on the other hand delivers language variations through "language sets". Again, this lends itself to reuse as you just enter the translated text once based on your template and it will be rendered across all renderings you have (mobile, print, etc.).

In Sitecore you can reuse the same content for a standard, mobile, tablet, or print rendering with minimal effort; equivalent functionality is not available in SharePoint.

SEO support

In a WCM system like Sitecore, any published page can be accessed via URL's specified while creating the page.

They can be extension less (e.g.: without the .aspx extension), have aliases (same page may be known via a shorter URL) . These features are available out of box in Sitecore. In SharePoint a simple scenario like this gets complex. One would need to make modifications to the webserver (IIS) hosting the SharePoint site. Developers need to hand roll these customizations. This can quickly become a maintenance issue as every URL change needs careful changes in IIS.

Web marketing features

The biggest gap in SharePoint is it is missing the entire Digital Marketing System (DMS) including features such as:

- Content targeting
- Lead scoring
- Multivariate testing

- Integrated analytics
- Campaign management
- SEO tools
- Form building tools (web forms for marketers)

This makes SharePoint great for intranets, extranets and corporate websites with little or no marketing features, but not so great for external content focused, marketing driven websites.

Longevity

In terms of functioning as a WCM, Sitecore has had the functionality, product focus, and support for features that are just now making it into SharePoint. Microsoft's focus with SharePoint is more as an ECM and collaboration tool as opposed to a pure WCM.

Cost

Implementing Sharepoint as a WCM for an external website where content is managed and driven by business users requires customizations that have significant cost implications. We believe that the implementation cost would be 35% to 50% higher with Sharepoint as compared to a pure WCM platform like Sitecore.

Moreover, SharePoint may be cost effective to a certain point from a license perspective, but as you extend it, you will need more database CALs (client access licenses) to use it effectively. More SharePoint CALs may be also be needed to make the most of your implementation. You may also have to buy third party products to integrate into it.

Conclusion

SharePoint is a great tool for _enterprise data_ management and collaboration. It is not a single feature product. It aims to meet 80% of the regular requirements of several products spanning Enterprise Content Management. SharePoint was not designed to be a WCM. WCM functionality was added to SharePoint 2010 as a feature and it works well for intranets and corporate sites.

Sitecore is one of the best mid-range web content management systems, with straightforward publishing model that is easy to use, has easier implementation and maintenance path. It also has many external plugins for additional site functionalities without custom development most of them being free of cost and has an out of the box digital marketing system.

While Sharepoint can be used, with necessary customizations, to launch and manage a site such as TaylorMorrison.com, we believe that a pure WCM such as Sitecore would be much more cost effective during initial implementation and to operate on a go forward basis.