



Best Practices to Drive User Adoption of SharePoint

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In the world of internal communications platforms, SharePoint reigns supreme. It is estimated that two-thirds of all enterprise organizations around the globe prefer SharePoint for internal communications, information sharing, business social and resource collaboration. However, in 2014, Redmond Magazine published a Forrester Research article that revealed a majority of those enterprises are using legacy versions of SharePoint for managing complex business use cases, and that a significant percentage has multiple versions deployed.ⁱ

Despite widespread SharePoint deployment, it is essential to have a plan to drive successful user adoption and avoid the negative ROI of “shelf ware”. Unfortunately, the Lighthouse Microsoft Technology Group has encountered numerous situations where user adoption planning is either not a high priority or not considered at all. Without an embracing user community, any solution can rapidly become irrelevant, with unhappy users going back to “what they know”. The result is product and application lifecycle processes that maintain the status quo instead of benefiting from the opportunities for collaboration and innovation that SharePoint provides.

With successful implementation of a robust adoption plan, SharePoint will become a vibrant, buoyant and engaging solution, touching every part of the company. And while different teams may have dissimilar use cases, the breadth and depth of successful SharePoint adoption and usage will become broadly visible, making a SharePoint Adoption Plan a business imperative.

Why do organizations think SharePoint user adoption is so difficult?

Why users resist: While companies see SharePoint as an efficient way to incorporate content management disciplines into their environments, workers are still driven by a legacy mindset that matured using shared folders, file shares, and mapped drives, e.g. “Look on the drive” and “Save it to O”. Those solutions work for them; it’s what they know and trust. Now you’re declaring that you have a great new solution that will make everyone’s lives better and reduce overall costs? Naturally, users will be skeptical. And that translates into...

More than one in four (26%) IT professionals surveyed said their SharePoint project had stalled and more than a third (37%) say they are struggling to meet original project expectations. Furthermore, 63% say they are limping along with “sub-optimum” SharePoint installations. Only 11% say their project has been a clearly recognized success by the business.ⁱⁱ

The Harvard Business School did a study entitled *Why Consumers Don't Buy: The Psychology of New Product Adoption* by John T. Gourville and the results led to the conclusion that a new product has to offer a 900% improvement over the existing solution for users to adopt it without hesitation.ⁱⁱⁱ But isn't that a Catch-22? How will users discover the improvements unless and until they adopt it? The answer is to offer a provable case that SharePoint is nine times better than email and shared folders in your SharePoint Adoption Plan.



It's not just the users: The results of an AIIM Industry Watch study titled *The SharePoint Puzzle – Adding the Missing Pieces* collected responses from 551 organizations. The report identified a lack of internal expertise, strategic planning, and user resistance to contributing and collaborating as the top three business issues associated with SharePoint. The study also found that only half (51%) of organizations had achieved adoption rates of 75% or more (users using SharePoint at least once per week). With this low adoption rate, it is clear that SharePoint is not being used to its potential.^{iv}

In spite of these obstacles, most organizations surveyed are planning to increase or maintain the level of SharePoint spend on internal development, integration with other repositories, training, and third-party add-ons, over the next 12 months.

The persistent ROI question: You spend precious company resources procuring, deploying and customizing the software, but as an IT leader the question will always be asked of you: "Is it worth the investment?" The answer lies in getting people to click into it and start working with it. But the data points above clearly indicate that unless you invest in a SharePoint Adoption Plan, it's unlikely that you will be able to convince your leadership team that it's worth the spend – or avoid a problematic deployment and the loss of credibility that goes along with it.

Are there other obstacles to widespread adoption of the SharePoint platform?

Possible technical obstacles to adoption: SharePoint product managers and developers rely on user feedback to continuously improve the agility, reach and functionality of the SharePoint platform. So while we have focused thus far on user adoption issues, we are equally concerned with technical product issues that may hinder adoption or limit usage.

For example, AIIM Industry Watch's *The SharePoint Puzzle* also revealed that the lack of integration with non-Microsoft based systems was also a major problem with 44% of respondents using other Enterprise Content Management and Document Management systems alongside SharePoint.^v Whatever the reason for having multiple systems (and many are detailed in the report), these organizations will not likely abandon their investment, making seamless integration with other systems critical to wider adoption.



More top issues with SharePoint:

- **Issue 1:** One size doesn't fit all! The SharePoint Adoption Plan doesn't work for all organizations.
- **Issue 2:** SharePoint training issues persist, like unclear, non-contextual, roles and responsibilities and specific technology gaps.
- **Issue 3:** Collaboration challenges: according to McKinsey Global Institute's *The Social Economy, July 2012*, teams are running in circles with 61% of office time spent coordinating collaboration efforts which means work is actually getting done 39% of the time; 38% of time is often lost duplicating work and searching for information across various systems.^{vi}
- **Issue 4:** SharePoint is a product that often requires adaptive change on the part of users. Learning the capabilities of the product is one thing – changing entrenched collaborative practice is another altogether. Users tend not to be charmed by shiny new solutions if they cannot see how it will make their jobs easier.

Implementing SharePoint 'in the flow' of Business

Implementing SharePoint in the flow of business means that SharePoint's capabilities and users' needs intersect at right time and the right place. SharePoint capabilities must meet users where they are; meaning they must provide the functionality needed to solve each user's current task or challenge, while being easy to understand and implement. When SharePoint is implemented outside the flow of business, user adoption will suffer and your user community will feel like they're 'pushing a rope'.

Implementing SharePoint 'above the flow' = read-only intranet: When you implement SharePoint above the flow of business you risk implementing a 'read-only intranet', also known as 'brochure-ware', that doesn't allow people to contribute their knowledge, ideas or special skills to the information stored within SharePoint. Often departmental intranets are implemented above the flow as they are meant only to provide access to announcements, forms and other specialized information. This environment is managed and locked-down by departmental gate keepers and thus does not allow users to post information or provide input. When you implement SharePoint above the flow of work, users – and your organization – will be incapable of reaping the benefits of SharePoint's powerful collaboration and knowledge exchange features.

Driving Sustainable User Adoption

Sustainable Adoption Objectives

To quote industry leader Dux Raymond Sy, the author of *SharePoint for Project Management*, we must implement “sustainable user adoption” to extend user adoption beyond a single point in time to an evolving process that continuously matures with the enterprise application. As this paper has outlined, obstacles to adoption will be unique to each organization, therefore, solving the issues of user adoption can never take a one-size-fits-all approach. Increasing user adoption is a lifecycle-level obligation made up of practical steps that each business must design and implement to enable long-term SharePoint success.

Sustainable adoption “on your terms”

SharePoint offers a wide range of functionality to your business, making collaboration in different environments much easier and productive. It also provides extensive support for third-party integrations, custom development and migration. Sustainable SharePoint adoption “on your terms” maximizes value with the least disruption to your organization in three key areas:

- **Collaborate** – Allowing people to work efficiently together instead of in silos drives innovation
- **Manage** -- Managing work proactively instead of reactively reduces time to value
- **Win** -- Build on enthusiasm over time by adding capabilities through successive iterations

5 steps to driving sustainable user adoption:

1. **Secure stakeholder buy in:** The key idea is to know your shareholders, how they relate to the initiative you are trying to launch and how they can help you.
2. **Map to business value:** Identify opportunities to map SharePoint capabilities to business goals and functions, thereby creating best practices for enterprise consumption.
3. **Drive success:** Pick a specific date or period of time to launch in order to allow ample time to prepare, build anticipation, and celebrate as a group. Develop proper communication and training before, during and after the launch
4. **Facilitate purposeful collaboration:** Focus on how your company will put the prioritized initiatives for SharePoint into practice.
5. **Evaluate, adapt and iterate:** Create a plan for long-term success to review achievements, maintain momentum, and adapt to new challenges.



A few techniques to increase user adoption:

- Try to implement SharePoint in phases.
- Training is a big part of user adoption. Identify Super Users and get them to actively use the new functionality, customize their own personal page, and provide peer training.
- Design a flexible UI to increase acceptance.
- Minimize the negative impact of technology changes with a phased rollout.
- Promote the adoption of new systems and solutions.
- Monitor regularly – stay in touch with users.
- Simplicity is key: stay away from things such as trying right away to identify the perfect link from 25 links available on the Quick Launch or Global menu of SharePoint.
- Encourage an organizational culture that embraces continuous evolution.

| Microsoft SharePoint - The Road Ahead

SharePoint is undeniably growing; revenue and user numbers have increased dramatically over the past few years. By achieving and sustaining user adoption planning, organizations can generate new collaboration opportunities and serve their clients more effectively. However, they need to motivate and encourage users about how SharePoint can support their daily business activities. Business needs and SharePoint capabilities should be aligned to deliver clearly defined, relevant business solutions. Organizations must identify training and change management needs and look at innovative learning strategies like gamification to motivate users.

Microsoft SharePoint remains a powerful, potentially invaluable enterprise tool; but one that needs commitment and resolve to be fully embedded into business processes. Perhaps the real lesson is that SharePoint is too important to be left to IT; the whole business needs to embrace it so it becomes the business engine it was designed to be, instead of very expensive shelf-ware.

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