

L&D Social Features for **SharePoint Dummies**

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Learning and development (L&D) professionals face many challenges in planning, developing, and delivering training to their learning communities.

This white paper series reviews some of those challenges and explores how key features of Microsoft SharePoint help address and overcome them. Properly applied, SharePoint enhances corporate learning and development and makes the learning professional's many tasks much lighter and the learner's success far more likely.

Introduction

In this white paper, we will describe how to address some instructional challenges and make coursebased learning more effective with SharePoint's social features. SharePoint has gained great acceptance in the corporate community, but many users have only a limited view of the many features that can be useful in their daily work.

We have created this white paper to help instructors and L&D professionals use key features of SharePoint to address the learning management challenges they face. Here, the word "course" covers a range of training content formats that include document-oriented courseware, e-learning, instructional videos, animations, webinars, and offline training.

When Bill Baer, Senior Product Marketing Manager at Microsoft, described SharePoint 2013's social features in a video overview, he said:

"Consider SP2013 a Social Renaissance for the Enterprise bringing the right people, and the right information, together in the right place." (Microsoft, 2012)

That sounds like a perfect formula for a great learning experience, so let's explore how L&D professionals such as instructors can address some of their course challenges by using SharePoint's social features before, during, and after their learners engage with them and their instructional content.

Social Learning Buzz and Benefits

During the past several years, there has been a major buzz for social learning. The excitement is great, and many organizations have developed their unique take on "social" in learning management. Why all the buzz? Social learning helps with some common learning management challenges. Here are just a few that SharePoint addresses:



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1. Expanding standard online e-learning by driving engagement to share ideas and concept
2. Enabling learners to work together and facilitate the group learning process
3. Seeking and receiving feedback from experts and fellow learners
4. Accessing immediate expertise for solving on-the-job challenges
5. Making deep problems shallow with the combined insights of the right social community
6. Sustaining an atmosphere of learning and competence after the initial training is completed

We are going to look at some concrete examples of how SharePoint's social features address real learning management challenges.

View from the Instructor's Seat

In learning management, the instructor provides leadership across the continuum of the course time line. Instructor responsibilities start before the course begins, increase during course delivery, and continue after the course is completed and the learners return to their work environments. Though learning management solutions (LMS) help instructors improve their efficiency and reduce repetitive, tedious work, SharePoint offers many benefits to instructors, even without an LMS. Properly used, SharePoint will help course participants learn faster and help instructors judge course effectiveness with surveys and on-the-job performance follow-up.

Here are a few ways SharePoint's social features add value over the life of the course and beyond.

Before the course begins

Well before the learners arrive at the classroom or receive links to their training material, the instructor has work to do. Announcing the course, setting learning and testing expectations, and assessing course participants for their preparedness and level of knowledge are all important pre-course tasks. Here are some SharePoint capabilities that help you, the learning professional, before your course begins.

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- 1. Announce the course and make course documents available to learners:** SharePoint document libraries are the right place to store relevant course documents. Using SharePoint's subscription capabilities, subscribe potential and confirmed course attendees to notifications about all changes in course material folders, and forget about email broadcasts.
- 2. Assess the readiness of your learners:** SharePoint surveys are a great way to assess the readiness of interested learners. A survey, as a course prerequisite, will give the instructor a clear picture of who is ready for this course and who needs remedial work.
- 3. Start driving engagement early and get the learners working together:** SharePoint community sites provide a link between learners about to attend the course, and those who have already taken it. The community site offers learners who need remediation a means to interact with experts, ask questions, and work to come up to speed. It also offers learners the opportunity to read the course reviews and comments that prior attendees recorded during and after the course.

During the Course

Once you complete the preliminary work of course setup and the course is in progress, SharePoint has great features to help you and your learners.

1. Help your learners work together to facilitate the group learning process:

SharePoint discussion boards are a great place to do that. When a learner has a question that invites discussion among class members, expert opinion, or after-hours follow-up, a discussion board offers a combination knowledge repository and forum. This is a great place for course hot topic focus areas. The discussion boards use the familiar Facebook look and feel, so instructor and attendees feel right at home. Every course participant benefits from the discussion. Retain the class interaction for future use in enhancing course material and for on-the-job refreshers.

2. Get feedback and find out whether your learners are learning:

SharePoint surveys are a great way for you to gain valuable mid-course insights. Are the learners hitting roadblocks? An after-lunch quick quiz, offered as a survey, will give you immediate feedback on who has learned what, and which parts of the course might need review or amplification. Of course, the survey is a great final exam tool, if there is no formal exam document for attendees to complete.

3. Pose interesting questions and get the learners to work on problem solving:

SharePoint microblogs offer learners a simple and fast approach to posing short questions and agreeing with or confirming the questions of other course attendees. Instructors get real-time feedback when course attendees are remote, and tagging features allow easy organization and management of discussion threads.

After the course

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When the successful learners finish their course materials and pass any course exams, you can follow attendee progress, and measure course and attendee effectiveness with SharePoint. It provides the critical feedback mechanism that improves course material and instructor techniques and helps ensure that successful learners remain successful on the job.

- 1. Learn from your learners:** SharePoint surveys are also the right tool for gathering feedback from attendees after the course. The time to get the learners' impressions of the course is while those impressions are fresh. Instructors can prepare a survey in advance to gain insight into which course material worked best and which needs work.
- 2. Improve your course with learner input:** Find out whether there are topics that should be included, remedial work that should be offered, or course elements that might be dropped. What about the timing and sequence of the course delivery? Use SharePoint surveys to find out what worked and what didn't. By the way, SharePoint surveys are a great way to see how the learners retain course material over time.
- 3. Sustain learning after the course ends:** When the course is over, the learning has just begun. SharePoint blogs remain the domain of instructor thought leaders and subject matter experts. As courses grow and change, blogs are a great way to deliver course updates, offer anecdotes from the latest classes, stimulate group discussion, and solicit and publish real-world work experiences of successful course attendees. Course-oriented blogs have a lifetime value well beyond the delivery of any individual course and any class of attendees.
- 4. Access immediate expertise to solve your learner's on-the-job challenges:** SharePoint discussion boards are the right mechanism to continue learner engagement once the course ends and the demands of the job test learner knowledge and skills. A discussion board is the place for practitioners and organization experts and managers to engage.
- 5. Build an idea lab discussion board and watch the next generation of experts evolve:** Course attendees who distinguish themselves on the job evolve into experts and grow to guide and mentor the next cohort of course attendees. The board itself becomes a knowledge repository and idea laboratory, as tales from the workplace merge with course material to create pragmatic success stories, deliver cautionary tales about what doesn't work, and catalyze discussion about new approaches and new learning opportunities.

SharePoint as a Learning Change Agent Assistant

Learning management and instruction are full of challenges. The good news is that SharePoint is full of useful features that smart learning professionals can employ to improve courseware, course delivery, and course follow-up. In fact, when properly used, it carries so much live information about the course, the students, and the course results that you can think of it as a change agent's assistant. In the hands of the right learning professionals, the knowledge content of SharePoint will support course enhancement, instructor training, and new course development, all from information captured as courses are organized, delivered, and followed up.

ShareKnowledge enhances the Value of SharePoint for Learning Professionals

This white paper describes the many benefits derived by learning management professionals when they use SharePoint as a key element in their learning management process. As valuable as SharePoint is, it is also clear that SharePoint is a complex amalgam of features and capabilities, more familiar to IT professionals than learning management practitioners. The good news is that ShareKnowledge LMS extends SharePoint to a fully featured learning management system and enhances the value of SharePoint's social features:

- Connect a forum course discussion as a link on the learner's ShareKnowledge homepage or in the course description.
- Add a SharePoint survey as a step in a compound course inside the LMS and get guaranteed feedback from learners.
- Give access to learning communities and the learning content to the same Active Directory user groups without having to double check the access to all information sources for every employee.
- Indicate the schedules of all learning activities in the learners' Outlook calendars.
- Add profound learning management features to SharePoint such as course assignment rules, learning reports, and e-signature.

The combination of SharePoint and ShareKnowledge means instructors and learners will achieve greater learning success before, during, and after their course has ended.

We hope you enjoyed this eBook and found the information we provided helpful. If you would like to learn more about ShareKnowledge, please click on the link at the bottom of this page.

