

SharePoint Team Sites to Aid

# Blended Learning



# A Step-by-Step Guide

One of the biggest challenges we face as corporate trainers is providing a learning environment that meets the needs of our workers. Blended learning is an approach becoming widely used because it allows employees control over their learning while also providing social interaction.

A blended learning approach ensures that not only is the learner engaged more and driving his/her individual learning experience to some degree, but also since different learners have different learning styles, a blended approach is more likely to cater to those varying needs.

This is a great benefit for learners and business alike, because as we know, the more workers are engaged the more productivity goes up.

Microsoft SharePoint and Office 365 are so widely adopted in the business world as a total business solution that it's hard to ignore the way organizations can benefit from also using them as an environment for learning curriculum like blended learning.

While SharePoint is widely used as a content collaboration system, for the purposes of this white paper, we'll be discussing specifically how to utilize SharePoint team sites for blended learning.

## What is Blended Learning

Before we discuss how to integrate blended learning and SharePoint, let's first discuss what exactly is blended learning.

While blended learning has been around for quite some time, in the last few years it has really catapulted as a leading learning trend to take hold of the industry.

Generally,

blended learning is a mix of media and methods including instructor-led training, online training, self-paced study and on the job training.

In fact, many trainers go as far as to say that it's the ideal solution because it appeals to all learning styles, circumstances, needs and demands.

The top forms of training for blended learning used by organizations include self-paced e-learning, virtual classrooms, project-based learning, social learning and face-to-face learning.

There are numerous benefits of blended learning, including:

# The Basics: SharePoint LMS Features Out-of-the-Box

- Increased productivity
- Increased sales
- More consistent adherence to standard procedures
- Greater management skills
- Provides greater flexibility in presenting training content
- Increases personalization of learning
- Delivers training in a cost effective format



## Blended Learning - Team Sites in SharePoint

SharePoint is a leading provider of content collaboration software which makes it an obvious choice when it comes to using it for training and more specifically, blended learning.

As we mentioned before, project-based learning is one of the most popular forms of blended learning. And, SharePoint team sites play particularly well for this type of training.

To set up a blended learning ecosystem in SharePoint, follow these steps:

### Step One – Inventory your content

At the base of any training program is content. So, this will be your first step – inventory and consolidate training in one central SharePoint library.

Keeping everything in one tidy place in SharePoint will ensure you have the latest version of your training content. Next time you need a handout, presentation or video, SharePoint's improved search capabilities make it a snap to find. In addition, you have the option to use strict controls that allow a trainer to lock the document once it's in its final state and dictate who can and cannot have access to it.

When you create your team site, it will be a simple step to upload content from your SharePoint document library to the team site.

### Step Two – Create a SharePoint team site

A team site in SharePoint is the perfect solution for project-based blended learning. SharePoint team sites make intradepartmental collaboration and information-sharing as easy as pie. Upload content, create task lists for team members, use blogs or wikis to share information, gather input with discussions or surveys and create a team calendar.

# The Basics: SharePoint LMS Features Out-of-the-Box

Once a classroom training is over, create a team site within SharePoint and download all training documents. Since you've already stored everything in the system, you can easily grab those documents from a SharePoint library and plunk directly into your team site. Voila! Now grant access to your site to specific students using active directory! Don't worry, they ALL know their password because it's the same one they use to log in to their work computer.

## Features of SharePoint Team Site

**Customizable themes** – Design your site specifically for your team with various logos, fonts and colors – making it easily recognizable to your learners.

**Announcement app** – Including an announcement section on a team site is very useful for instructors. Trainers can post information about classes and schedules such as presentation changes, cancellations and reminders. They can use the announcement app, list alerts or even email the team.

**Calendar** – A trainer can easily post on the calendar that will ensure all students are on the same page. For example, it can inform about presentations, assignments, labs, and events. Alerts can also be enabled.

**Lists** – Lists can be used for many things but one very useful way is to include a contact list of everybody on the team that includes name, phone numbers, location, role, etc.

**Discussion board** – Obviously this is a very important feature of blended learning and important for your team site. Students have direct access to chat with one another as well as the teacher.

**Learner interaction** – Learner interaction is crucial for blended learning and SharePoint offers several features such as discussion boards, community pages, blogs and forums.

**Document libraries** – Another very useful feature of SharePoint team sites. There will always be specific handouts and information tied to a training. Students on your team site will have easy access to everything they need. Content can even be set to read-only.

**Video instruction** is very popular and they can be included in a library or web part.

**Units of study/hiding units** – This section of the team site can list links to useful websites and library containing project information for a particular unit of study. When complete, these units can be hidden from the main view so that only the current information is visible.

# The Basics: SharePoint LMS Features Out-of-the-Box

## Step Three – Set up Collaboration Features

One of the great advantages of the SharePoint platform is its multitude of built-in collaboration features.

Some of the features that can be leveraged for your blended learning ecosystem include:

- Announcements that can be forwarded to email
- Calendars for tracking important dates
- Discussion boards for learner interaction
- Blogs for instructor-added content
- Surveys for feedback

Discussion boards within a team site are great for project-based learning but sometimes those students can learn from others outside the group as well. This is where community sites and MySites are a beneficial tool to utilize within SharePoint.

Community sites give the user a forum experience which is intended to cultivate discussions with a broad group of people across an organization. Community Sites promote open communication and information exchange by fostering discussions among users who share their expertise and use expertise of others who have knowledge in specific areas of interest.

MySites are another great social feature of SharePoint. They are essentially personal profiles that provide a central place for users to store personal and shared documents, promote their user information and expertise, tag content, and communicate with others by using the note board. Through people search, users can connect with one another and benefit from expertise of others in their organization. My Sites also contain a microblog and newsfeed feature. These features allow users to engage in short, public conversations and keep up-to-date on activities from content and people in which they are interested.

## ShareKnowledge Blended Learning

Blended learning in SharePoint can successfully be done however some companies will want to take it one step further with ShareKnowledge.

ShareKnowledge is built on top of your SharePoint and thus works and inherits all of the same features of SharePoint like content management and social.

With the addition of an LMS, like ShareKnowledge, you can add a robust learning system that both tracks formal and informal learning, connects a discussion to a specific course, assign courses for learners based on organizational unit or other attributes to a group of users, or utilize the PowerSync™ feature that automatically adjusts training needs based on promotions, transfers and team changes without additional staff work.