
Rethinking Your ECM Strategy? It's Time to Consider SharePoint

Why Migrating Content to SharePoint is Manageable
with Migration Utilities and Careful Planning

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The Content Management Dilemma

While most organizations adopted Microsoft® productivity tools many years ago, many are now rethinking their approach to managing content within their business systems. Some have invested in enterprise content management (ECM) systems to manage documents and other kinds of unstructured information. Many have simply tried to make do with Windows file shares – exploiting the access controls and security of Windows Server and .NET services. But with the move to cloud computing and innovative social technologies, now there are many more ways for employees and work groups to collaborate and share information over electronic networks.

For Microsoft-centric organizations, SharePoint® is the preferred solution for managing all of the documents and other kinds of unstructured information that employees produce. And this raises the sticky questions about what organizations should do with all of the content they already store and maintain.

- If organizations already have an ECM system, should they maintain or replace it?
- If firms need to incorporate files from Windows file shares, how should they handle them?
- Should organizations migrate all of their content to SharePoint, or just adopt SharePoint for new content and leave legacy information where it is – residing on existing ECM systems and Windows file shares?
- What are the challenges and costs of migrating to SharePoint?
- Is it best to handle the migration challenges in house, or should organizations turn the tasks over experienced business partners to manage the process?

In our view, SharePoint is poised to replace many legacy ECM systems for routine content and document management tasks. Initially deployed primarily as a collaboration tool for teams or departments, SharePoint has grown virally within organizations. As Microsoft has added many enterprise management capabilities, SharePoint now provides more comprehensive capabilities as an ECM platform.

This raises the content management dilemma. IT directors surveying their systems and applications within their organizations realize that they are managing multiple content stores. For business users who understand the benefits, it's not a huge leap to consider making SharePoint their preferred or *only* ECM platform.

Of course, for some situations a complete replacement of existing content stores does not make sense. Perhaps for compliance reasons or because of integration with third-party applications, organizations need to continue using an ECM platform to manage at least some of their enterprise content. But for many others, the question is not *if* they should migrate to SharePoint, but *when* and *how*.

This paper is written for those organizations. We lay out the main reasons people choose to migrate their enterprise content to SharePoint, and we identify the principal drivers that apply to many situations.

The decision to migrate content to SharePoint should not be taken lightly. While we believe that most organizations have important business reasons for doing so, there are also a number of considerations that must be discussed prior to initiating a migration project. We will review the most important topics to consider and lay out the alternatives.

There are various approaches to managing a migration – including handling it within an existing IT group, hiring outside consultants to direct the process, or using a software product designed specifically for migrating content from ECM systems to SharePoint. We'll look at the pros and cons of each. Traditionally businesses have taken one of the first two approaches to content migration – either managing it on their own or bringing in a consultant.

Today, more organizations are using migration products, which have significantly matured in the last few years. We will explain why we believe that this is a good approach for many businesses. For this option, there are many products to choose from. We'll present criteria for evaluating these various products so that organizations can select the one that best meets their needs.

Ultimately the purpose of this paper is to help organizations assess their alternatives and prepare for migrating enterprise content to SharePoint. We will identify important considerations and provide an overview of best practices in content migration.

The Case for SharePoint: Managing Unstructured Information while Lowering TCO

Once seen as primarily a collaboration tool, SharePoint now plays a major role within many organizations as its capabilities have evolved and expanded. While it certainly does not offer all of the features of a mature ECM system – such as OpenText[®], IBM[®] FileNet[®], or EMC[®] Documentum[®] – for many organizations that is exactly the point. SharePoint remains easy to use for business users and easy to deploy for IT groups.

And what it doesn't provide in out-of-the-box capabilities can usually be acquired as needed through add-on apps and an extensive partner network. In fact, this existing ecosystem of third-party developers and resellers offering product extensions is one of the attractive benefits of SharePoint.

While SharePoint has evolved and its ecosystem has grown, business needs have also changed. There's less appetite today for large enterprise solutions that require significant upfront investments. Lighter applications and cloud-based technologies promise a number of advantages: lower cost, greater flexibility, faster user adoption, and greater accessibility for a workforce that is increasingly mobile. SharePoint fits this model.

As a result, SharePoint has become one of Microsoft's fastest-growing products, a \$2 billion-per-year business for the company. Among the enhancements that make SharePoint 2013 appealing to organizations are stronger social networking capabilities, a revamped search engine, and broader BI capabilities.¹ For many customers, the most important developments include tighter integration with Microsoft® Office® and the movement to the cloud with both SharePoint online and Office 365®.

In fact, SharePoint is fast becoming the de facto industry standard for providing core ECM capabilities to capture, organize, share, and secure content across an enterprise. Organizations cite the following benefits when discussing their reasons for standardizing on SharePoint²:

- High end-user productivity and lower training costs, due to integration with existing Microsoft productivity tools
- Better user experience, with improved performance for accessing and collaborating on content
- Ability to extend and customize the platform with partner apps and extensions
- High platform stability and reliability, due to significant, long-term investment from Microsoft

¹ <http://rcpmag.com/articles/2012/11/14/microsoft-showcases-sharepoint-2013.aspx>

² A number of reports outline the benefits of using SharePoint as a content management tool. See for example: "Benefits of Migration to the SharePoint 2010 Collaboration Platform: An Enterprise Perspective," Pique Solutions, April 2011. <http://www.piquesolutions.com/1870.pdf>

- Alignment with overall technology strategy, which for many Microsoft-savvy organizations emphasizes compatibility with other Microsoft applications
- Easier and less costly maintenance, administration, and development due to widespread Microsoft expertise

In the big picture, SharePoint offers organizations some important advantages over traditional ECM platforms – namely, greater flexibility with lower total cost of ownership (TCO). The ability to integrate and customize SharePoint means that companies can shape it to their needs. And given the pace of innovation with SharePoint and its partner ecosystem, that advantage will almost certainly persist.

At the same time lower maintenance and licensing costs provide an overall lower TCO. In this era of cloud computing and “bring your own device,” TCO has become an important criteria when selecting technology vendors.

MIGRATING FROM LEGACY ECM SYSTEMS CAN REDUCE COSTS

In addition to considering the benefits listed above, organizations should also weigh the cost of staying with an existing ECM system. Organizations have absorbed these costs for years as they have opted for often costly, on-premise, enterprise applications. ECM applications have lengthy payback periods and often come with additional costs that customers continue paying year after year.

Some of the factors that encourage organizations to abandon an existing ECM system include:

- **High annual license and maintenance fees.** Eliminating licensing and maintenance fees alone may justify the cost and effort of migration.³
- **Poor user adoption.** Despite promises of greater productivity and efficiency, many organizations have struggled to get users to embrace ECM applications.
- **Less-than-optimal performance.** End users often complain about the difficulty of finding or accessing content stored in ECM systems.
- **Support costs.** Existing ECM systems often come with pricey support contracts. Support is often required because it is not easy to find and hire

³ For an detailed report on potential cost savings for migrating to SharePoint, see the Pique Solutions report, “The Business Case for Migrating from IBM to the SharePoint Platform: The Cost Advantages,” July 2011. <http://www.piquesolutions.com/1879.pdf>

IT personnel with expertise in these systems. Consultants tend to be costly as well.

- **More complex IT environment.** More vendors and systems often leads to greater complexity. For many IT teams, standardizing on Microsoft is a simpler and safer approach.
- **Custom code.** It's common for organizations to customize their ECM deployment or build custom applications on the platform, which can lead to painful upgrades and more expensive support.
- **Uncertainty.** With so much consolidation in the industry,⁴ relationships with existing ECM vendors may be uncertain at best.

DIFFICULTY WITH MIGRATION MAY BE OVERSTATED

Despite the benefits of migrating off a legacy ECM system and onto Microsoft SharePoint, it's understandable for an IT group to hesitate undertaking such a complex project. For instance, an IT group can spend substantial time and effort on their own, only to abandon the migration project if the file plans and metadata cannot be properly translated. IT directors assume that the project will take longer, require more internal resources, and cost more for outside consultants than the optimistic estimates that are presented to them. Based on previous experience, often these are reasonable concerns.

However, to the pleasant surprise of many in IT, a SharePoint migration is often easier than estimated and yields unexpected benefits. According to a survey by Pique Solutions, "Companies that migrated to SharePoint reported that the technical and business benefits they achieved were higher, and the hurdles of migration were less significant, than they had anticipated."⁵ Of particular interest, organizations often discover hidden benefits and business value after their migrating to SharePoint, most noticeably around integration with other business systems and end-user productivity. Improvements in user productivity are consistently reported as an outcome, and a superior end-user experience typically leads to increased adoption as well.

MIGRATION TO SHAREPOINT IS NOT APPROPRIATE FOR EVERY SITUATION

With the proper planning and approach (which we will discuss next), a SharePoint migration need not be costly or overly complicated. At the same time, however, it must be noted that a complete migration of enterprise content to SharePoint is not necessarily the best option for all organizations or every situation.

⁴ After several years of acquisition by companies such as EMC, Oracle, and IBM, there's just one major independent ECM vendor left: OpenText.

⁵ Ibid. Pique Solutions: <http://www.piquesolutions.com/1870.pdf>

There may be a number of reasons for continuing to use an existing ECM platform. For instance, organizations may have invested heavily in developing custom applications that cannot be easily or cost-effectively replicated in SharePoint. Perhaps there is a need to preserve an existing records management system integrated with an ECM platform. Possibly there are extensive integrations with structured data platforms such as ERM, ERP, or CRM systems that would be difficult and costly to reproduce. In situations such as these, a managed, product-based integration might be a better option – and one that leaves existing ECM applications in place to continue managing difficult-to-migrate tasks while adopting SharePoint to support more contemporary activities.

Among the most important reasons for delaying a content migration project are: 1) lack of business case, and 2) absence of a strong team to lead the migration effort. Success will depend on having a cross-departmental approach with leaders from different areas of the business to both provide input and help explain the business justification to the rest of the organization. While a pilot project may be appropriate, without a strong team and business case organizations may not be ready to undertake a significant SharePoint migration.

Planning Is the Key to Success

“Measure twice, cut once.” That idea is certainly relevant to this discussion. Careful planning should precede any content migration effort. In this section we lay out the principal issues that you as business and technology leaders in your organizations should consider before tackling a migration project.

STRATEGY AND BUSINESS JUSTIFICATION

Although we are discussing SharePoint as if it were the end goal, technology is **not** the driver – or should not be. It's the means to an end.

One can approach a possible migration as a decision among a series of options: remaining with a current ECM platform or simply maintaining “files-in-the-wild” with Windows file shares; moving to SharePoint; or taking a hybrid approach between these two. But we recommend that organizations begin by focusing on more fundamental issues: defining the overall outcomes (considering such factors as employee experience, adoption rates and costs) and assessing the projected payback estimates required to achieve the goals.

The content migration business case should answer these issues, lay out the benefits and pitfalls, and identify the results you hope to achieve so you can then create key

performance indicators (KPIs) to track your progress. How to proceed will become clear once you have “measured” your goals.

HANDLING CUSTOMIZATION

Customization has always been a mixed bag for customers of ECM vendors. The ability to customize the platform has enabled organizations to design applications for specific purposes and business processes. This can result in greater efficiency and automation – except when it comes to new releases and upgrades, which are often painful. By contrast, moving to SharePoint may reduce both the need for customized development and the corresponding upgrade difficulties.

Nevertheless, if you have invested significantly in custom applications or third-party modules for your ECM platform, your migration to SharePoint will be more complex. And you will want to first determine whether equivalent functionality exists in SharePoint, perhaps supported by a partner app. This analysis will guide your migration decisions. In some cases, extensive customization is a valid reason for *not* migrating all of your enterprise content to SharePoint.

ADVANTAGES OF A PHASED APPROACH

In some cases, depending on the volume and type of content, how the ECM system is integrated with line-of-business applications, and other conditions, migration to SharePoint will be a phased approach. For some organizations, a complete, one-time migration from an existing ECM system is disruptive – and it can be a somewhat Herculean effort.

It may also be unnecessary. For many organizations, a partial migration meets the business objectives – for example, allowing users to take advantage of SharePoint for active projects while maintaining a read-only repository of legacy content. In cases like these, maintaining both platforms may be a sensible approach. If you choose to maintain two platforms, you may also consider an integration between SharePoint and your ECM platform while planning for a complete migration down the road.

If you choose a one-time migration, you should be aware that there are ways to minimize disruption through scheduling and throttling during peak usage. In either case, you may want to start with a pilot project, which has the advantage of highlighting potential issues that you'll need to address during migration, such as security, access rights, internal URLs, information governance, and so on.

TACKLING METADATA

The metadata associated with each document may be as important as the content itself. However, the metadata needs to be carefully defined and properly managed by the user community – and often it isn't. Some organizations have employed extensive metadata customization and added custom fields, all of which complicates a content migration. Fortunately Microsoft has significantly improved SharePoint's handling of metadata over successive product releases, which makes the prospect of migrating content from an ECM application easier to plan and implement.⁶

In the best-case scenario, the content has been well tagged by users, but you will certainly need to devote a good deal attention to the whole issue of metadata. You will likely want to run tests to find out what tags are associated with a document before *and* after migration. Custom fields and extensive metadata sets may complicate migrations. A good software tool designed specifically for SharePoint migrations and capable of converting field types on-the-fly can be very beneficial here.

On the other hand, a large-scale migration is an opportunity to re-educate users of the value of systematically tagging content with predefined metadata for search, for workflow processes, for compliance and records management, and so on.

INVOLVING USERS AND BUSINESS LEADERS

A successful migration to SharePoint absolutely depends on engaging the user community in the process, and that means including leaders from outside IT to participate in the planning and rollout. These participants are needed to ensure that the project addresses the needs of end users, who will be most impacted by the change. Getting the buy-in of business leaders and the support of executive sponsors is vital to success.

Experience shows that end users are quick to adopt SharePoint, for the reasons discussed above. While certainly a benefit, this widespread adoption can also lead to "SharePoint sprawl," a common problem in which hundreds of SharePoint sites pop up and then stagnate, creating headaches for compliance officers and costly storage requirements for IT. Involving leaders from among the user community in the migration and rollout can mitigate this problem.

In general, a migration project also provides a rare opportunity to re-imagine (or at least reconsider) the way content is organized and managed in your business. This is another

⁶ SharePoint 2013 has made significant advances with the addition of the term store, managed metadata, and content types. These improvements make it easier for organizations to migrate a well-structured legacy ECM application into SharePoint.

reason why business leaders should participate in the migration. Issues such as compliance, content preservation and disposition, archiving, storage optimization, and search can be addressed and better managed going forward if you take advantage of this opportunity.

Organizations Should Consider Different Migration Options

Migrating enterprise content can be a complex undertaking, as we mentioned above, and IT directors are understandably hesitant about handling the whole project internally. When planning a large content migration, IT directors often bring in outside consultants, sometimes playing an advisory role, sometimes taking the lead and managing the entire project. We believe this will continue to be the case for a significant percentage of SharePoint migrations within large enterprises; however, we also feel that the role of outside consultants in these migrations will become less important over time.

Today there are software tools available to automate many of the migration tasks that consultants have traditionally handled, and they can do so at a fraction of the cost of consulting and custom coding. Depending on the complexity of your migration, you may choose to use an outside consultant, but there are more options available today.

Ultimately we believe most companies are best served by utilizing a software product to automate their SharePoint migration. The best products on the market will save organizations a significant amount of time and money. However, it's important to note that these products are still relatively new. As a result, there can be wide variation between them – some are more mature and stable, others lag behind. (In the next section we'll discuss features to consider in a SharePoint migration tool.)

Moreover, while we believe that a migration product should be among the tools you employ, we also recognize that for most companies will use a blend of internal resources, external consultants, and out-of-the-box migration products for the advantages each one provides. (See Table 1 below for an assessment of the trade-offs among the various options.)

Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages
Perform in-house migration, using custom development and testing	<p>Rely on internal staff only; no need to invest in outside consultants</p> <p>An internal team is already (or should be) very familiar with the ECM environment</p> <p>An internal team has the luxury of moving at its own pace and testing as needed to ensure a smooth migration</p>	<p>Diverts IT resources from other projects</p> <p>Internal team may not have experience in handling large migrations and resulting complications</p> <p>Projects may not proceed as quickly without outside assistance due to other priorities and unexpected interruptions</p>
Hire a consulting company that specializes in SharePoint migration	<p>Expertise: migration consultants offer highly specialized knowledge and familiarity with likely problems</p> <p>May bring their own migration utility: either developed by the consultant or licensed from an existing software vendor</p>	<p>Consulting costs can be significant</p> <p>Consultants may need time to fully understand the intricacies of your IT/ECM environment</p> <p>Consultants may be more knowledgeable on one side or the other (ECM or SharePoint)</p> <p>Consultants may fully appreciate value of existing metadata, and may attempt to reorganize content during migration</p>
License a software product to automate migration tasks	<p>Very cost-effective, compared with external consulting or labor costs for internal team</p> <p>Can significantly reduce time and effort to perform majority of migration tasks; in some cases may be able to completely automate process</p> <p>May be less disruptive than consulting services</p>	<p>Wide variation in capabilities between one product and another; important to research capabilities upfront</p> <p>May still require some outside consulting or internal coding</p>

Table 1. Advantages and Disadvantages of Three Approaches to ECM Migration

When Choosing a Migration Tool, Due Diligence Is Important

As with so many other business processes, software products offer the ability to significantly reduce manual effort and cost associated with migrating from an ECM platform to SharePoint. But because there are important differences between products on the market, it's vital that organizations take a close look at capabilities to ensure that the product they choose will adequately address their needs.

EASY TO USE

Migration tools have matured over the years, and an example of the improvements to these software applications is the user experience. The best migration tools provide features such as a point-and-click graphical interface as well as informational dashboards that provide an easy way to check the progress of a content migration. A

good migration tool will include a visual explorer that allows people to build, organize, and navigate a large and possibly complex hierarchy of content-based migration rules (or jobs).

AUTOMATION

The point of a migration tool is to make the job of migrating content much easier. These tools should automate the process by providing a library of pre-configured tasks and templates that can be selected and executed with a simple point and click. Pre-configured tasks reduce or even eliminate custom coding – for that reason they can also reduce both the duration of consulting services and the level of expertise required.

Templates provide a similar capability, allowing you to define a set of tasks for a given content type, metadata attributes, content values, location of files, permissions, etc. Templates can then be used to replicate the same set of tasks to similar situations. In most environments, it should be possible to automate 80 to 90 percent of migration tasks and save a significant amount of time for the IT staff (and/or consultants).

CUSTOMIZATION AND CONFIGURATION

In addition to automating a migration project with pre-configured tasks and templates, the tool should support custom scripting for the 10 to 20 percent of migration tasks that cannot be automated. A good migration product will include customization tools – for example, by allowing you to create custom scripts and saving them as rules or templates that can then be embedded and run alongside the other automated tasks.

The ability to easily transition from development to testing to production is also important. A good product will allow you to transfer and run your migration rules and templates in each of these environments.

Useful configuration options include the ability to run pilot projects, take a phased approach, or schedule migration tasks at off-peak times. Scheduling and throttling provide better management of the migration process and reduce disruption to content management users. Monitoring, notification, restart, and rollback are options that allow an IT team to discover potential problems early on and make changes to optimize the process.

In the appendix (see page 15), we provide a more comprehensive list of features that you should consider when evaluating migration tools.

Making SharePoint Migrations Manageable

After years of operating large, on-premise ECM systems, many organizations now conclude that SharePoint offers a better solution for managing enterprise content – user friendly, easier to deploy, less costly to manage and maintain. Improvements in SharePoint capabilities, the ever-growing network of third-party app developers, and developments in cloud-based content and data solutions make SharePoint a viable ECM solution.

Until recently, however, IT directors have been unenthusiastic about the prospect of migrating all of their content over to SharePoint. But this now is changing. Today, the obstacles are not as formidable as they once were. Utilities can automate most migration tasks, and it is no longer necessary to dedicate a lot of internal resources to the project or spend a huge amount of money on outside consultants.

The key to successfully migrating from a traditional ECM platform (and/or a collection of Windows file-shares) to SharePoint is *strategy plus technology*. Take time to carefully plan the migration; and consider the available migration utilities, which can make the project faster, easier, and less expensive. If you do your due diligence – both in the planning and strategy phase and then in selecting a migration tool that meets the requirements you've defined in the strategy phase – you'll find that most migrations are quite manageable.

Appendix: Vendor Rating Worksheet

This worksheet is intended to help you evaluate various migration solutions. We recommend that you review the capabilities of each vendor's solution and rate each capability on a scale (1 to 5). The sum of those scores should help you determine which vendor best meets your needs.

Feature	Migration Utility #1 Vendor: _____	Migration Utility #2 Vendor: _____	Migration Utility #3 Vendor: _____
	Rating: 1 – 5	Rating: 1 – 5	Rating: 1 – 5
Easy to Use Features such as a point-and-click graphical interface make it easy for IT personnel to configure, initiate, and verify migration tasks.			
Dashboards Dashboards provide a quick, clear way to check progress of content migration.			
Error Notification Audit reports enable IT personnel to spot problems and remediate them.			
Library of Migration Tasks and Templates An extensive out-of-the-box library of tasks and templates minimizes custom coding and reduces duration of services or consulting.			
Customizable Migration tasks can be configured using pre-defined options or customizable parameters. Options are based on criteria such as metadata attributes, content values, location of files, permissions, etc. Support for custom scripting enables additional automation.			
Turnkey Automation In most environments, 80% to 90% of migration tasks can be automated based on pre-configured options.			

Feature	Migration Utility #1 Vendor: _____	Migration Utility #2 Vendor: _____	Migration Utility #3 Vendor: _____
	Rating: 1 – 5	Rating: 1 – 5	Rating: 1 – 5
<p>Template Reuse</p> <p>Templates can be modified to address similar but unique content types and then reused, saving a significant amount of time.</p>			
<p>Phased Approach or Pilot Projects</p> <p>Running a migration project in phases or in small, granular tests reduces disruption and allows IT team to discover potential problems early on.</p>			
<p>Hardware Independence</p> <p>No service pack or hardware prerequisites eliminates potential problems upfront.</p>			
<p>Content Reorganization at Destination</p> <p>Migration to SharePoint is an opportunity to improve content organization. Migration tools can enable this process.</p>			
<p>Out-of-the-Box Connectors</p> <p>Connectors to all major ECM platforms are provided. Connectors understand content, metadata, permissions, and other supporting ECM information for all platforms.</p>			
<p>Migration Scheduler</p> <p>To minimize disruption, migration tasks can be scheduled at off-peak times or for load balancing.</p>			
<p>Integration Support</p> <p>Vendor provides capability for a “stopgap” integration between SharePoint and ECM platform, buying time for an optimal migration later.</p>			
Total Rating			

About Bock & Company

Geoffrey Bock, principal of Bock & Company, focuses on digital strategies for content and collaboration. An analyst and author with over twenty-five years industry experience, Geoffrey tracks how organizations create, organize, and manage business information to sustain profitable relationships. As a consultant and thought-leader, he advises software companies, end-user organizations, and government agencies in areas of business planning, technology innovation, and operational excellence. Geoffrey can be reached at geoffbock@gmail.com.

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John Hyde, principle of Bullet Marketing, helps clients achieve their business goals through strategic marketing and branding. He advises small and midsize businesses and nonprofits in five key areas: marketing communications, online strategy, identity & branding, corporate events, and marketing efficiency. Bullet Marketing designs marketing programs that deliver the fire-power and impact clients are looking for. Learn more at www.bullet-marketing.com.