

ENTERPRISE COLLABORATION

Steps to Portals' and Intranets' Setup

A Whitepaper by
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Abstract

With the enterprises getting global and growing with more workforce, managing data and collaborating with each other could be troublesome. Portals and Intranets can perform as an excellent collaboration platforms for such enterprises and help them streamline their communication processes.

These portal solutions can serve a small scale business or can be part of enterprise level applications. This whitepaper focuses on the need of such collaboration platforms and the available options.

Introduction

Every organization, whether large or small, constantly looks for expansions. These expansions could either be within an enterprise in the form of increasing the workforce and business or could be across enterprises in the form of mergers and acquisitions. In both these scenarios, there is an increase in the level of complexity involved in communication flow and the collaboration process.

Another challenge being faced by the organizations now a days is to manage high amounts of data. Documents are no more limited to text files or excel sheets, they are now being replaced with high quality PowerPoint and PDF files. Interactive content and videos are what makes an organizations presentation to prospects different from others.

Enterprise Collaboration Systems help in easy collaboration of data across different communication channels and organization levels. At the same time, these systems also helps in proper organization of data such that it acts as a one-stop repository for all organization needs.

Enterprise Collaboration and Challenges

A collaboration portal in simple terms can be defined as a system which helps in efficient communication and collaboration between different teams or organizations. In an Enterprise collaboration setup, the major areas of implementation are:

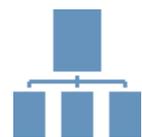


Team Collaborations

When multiple teams are working on same project or a piece of information needs to be accessed and managed by separate teams, collaboration portals help in creating areas for each team to work on their piece of task.

Organization Collaborations

Multiple teams can collaborate on together and share their knowledge and resources with each other. In an organization where multiple user roles are involved, organizational collaborations help in segregating content for specific role types.



Social Collaborations

Besides the professional activities involved within an organization, enterprises can run social networking platforms for the employees to collaborate with each other in a bit informal manner and link with each other personally as well.

Challenges in Enterprise Collaboration

Enterprises now-a-days involve a number of stakeholders with interests in organizational activities. An increase in the number of Stakeholders means an increase in the communication channels involved which in turn leads to a rise in the complexity of the information flow. This increase in complexity means an increase in the complexity of the setup of a solution.

Thus, just implementing a collaboration solution is not enough. What is required here is to have a complete understanding of the organization

Tools Available (Market Leaders)

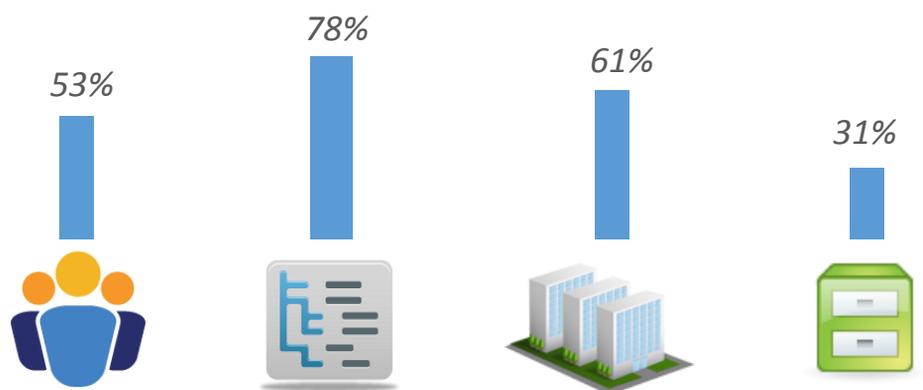
To setup an enterprise collaboration system in an organization, there are multiple tools available in market. Both paid and open source solutions are available. Here, in this document, we highlight two of the market leaders, one of which is paid and the other one being open source.

SharePoint

SharePoint is a tool based on Microsoft technology which provides organisations an easy, flexible and powerful Intranet as well as Extranet software package. It facilitates team collaborations, in addition to document, knowledge and record management. In SharePoint WSS is the core technology used for collaboration and MOSS technology extends the capability of WSS by adding more features. Microsoft Products (excel, word etc.) are well integrated with SharePoint. It also provide integration and support for Microsoft Outlook, PDF files, Document Metadata Management and sharing contact information etc.

SharePoint stands at the top in the market because of some amazing features. Being a Microsoft product, it integrates well with Microsoft Office and Outlook for better sharing of files, contacts and other communication related data. Users can search business data more easily by entering the keyword or search type. SharePoint also offers social collaboration where teams or organisations can communicate with each other by managing documents, making comments and giving ratings.

Dominant Use Cases of SharePoint



Source: Fall 2011 SharePoint Survey, OpenText & Global 360

LifeRay

LifeRay is an open source collaboration solution. It is implemented in JAVA. Like SharePoint, LifeRay can also be integrated with the Microsoft Office and has ability to integrate with databases like: IBM, Oracle, MySQL, SQL Server, etc.. LifeRay have many features similar to that as SharePoint along with some other feature rich modules like: Abuse Tracking, Instant Messaging, Integrated workflows, Auditing, Script base management.

LifeRay is a web portal supporting many features of enterprise collaboration. One can organize the content using categories and tags. Categorisation can even be done on the basis of region, country etc. With support of permission based sharing, it makes sure that every file or document is visible only to people who are authorized to view that data. LifeRay has ability for secure communication and collaboration. It also supports custom fields and on these custom fields, the administrator can apply field level permissions. Moderation can be done through work flow in the LifeRay where documents, web content and wiki can go through the approval process for refinements.

Liferay Social Office Community Edition (CE)

An Open Source Sharepoint Alternative, Liferay Social Office is a social collaboration solution for the enterprise that streamlines communication, saves time, builds group cohesion and raises productivity. It is a shared workspace solution that helps office teams work collaboratively using the right tools for sharing knowledge and communicating. Everything that modern companies need are included: profiles, blogs, document sharing, message boards, wikis, activity feeds and micro-blogs. And unlike Sharepoint®, Social Office is built on Liferay's open source Java platform to ensure enterprise IT can support and extend the application to grow with the business.

It was created in response to wide demand for implementing the Liferay Portal platform as a team collaboration solution. To be clear, Liferay Social Office is built on Liferay Portal, created by picking, integrating, and packaging Liferay Portal's most asked-for features and capabilities for social collaboration use cases.

There is not much difference between Liferay Social Office Community Edition and Enterprise Edition except licensing and support.

Social Office works with the new Liferay Sync, which allows you to access documents from your desktop, mobile, or tablet device. Automatic syncing keeps you up-to-date.

Create, manage, and search for group events using the community-based calendar. Set up event reminders by e-mail, IM, or SMS.

Alfresco ECM

Alfresco is providing ECM tools under three heads; Alfresco One, Alfresco in the Cloud and Alfresco Community Edition.

Alfresco One is a hybrid cloud Enterprise Content Management (ECM) platform that manages and synchronizes content across cloud and on-premises repositories. Industry-leading mobile platforms and application integration allows users to collaborate on business critical content wherever and however they work. Alfresco open, modern architecture enables easy extension and customization, while integrated records management simplifies and strengthens information governance and compliance. Alfresco One manages more than seven billion documents for thousands of companies worldwide.

Alfresco in the Cloud is a Software as a Service (SaaS) hosted solution for companies wanting the power of Alfresco One, without the need to store content on premises or requiring the functionality provided by additional Alfresco One modules. Users can collaborate on content wherever and however they work, providing secure external team collaboration, full mobile access and workflow for document review and approval.

Alfresco Community Edition is an innovative, open source Enterprise Content Management platform intended for use in non-critical environments. Distributed under the LGPLv3 license, it is free to download and best suited for developers and technical enthusiasts who are willing to self-support and don't required the additional enterprise-class features offered by Alfresco One.

Our Approach— Steps to Enterprise Collaboration Setup

As mentioned previously, a lot of people are involved in an enterprise with each having a specific piece of role. So setting up an enterprise collaboration platform without studying the enterprise itself could never be a correct decision. As a result, we have defined a set of 4 steps before for starting with the actual implementation of the system.

1. Organization Structure

Organization structure of an enterprise helps in gaining knowledge of the various departments that are present, how they are linked to each other, how does the inter-department communication works, is the company located at different locations, are different tasks being handled at different locations and other similar items.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

What are the roles, powers and responsibilities of the people in the organization who will be using this system, how are these assigned, controlled and coordinated, how does the information flow between various levels of the organization, etc.? Studying this helps in understanding the roles, responsibilities and reporting structures that exist within an organization. A system thus developed, makes sure that it is aligned well with what is already being implemented in that organization.

3. Know the Processes

Knowing the processes in an organization helps in understanding that how work is performed in an organization which involves multiple roles and departments. It describes how the people collaborate with each other to perform the work. Knowledge of this is important to build a system where multiple teams are working on same task or project.

4. Workflow Implementation

Workflows help in knowing the processes of an organization at a more concrete level. Workflow diagrams are created for all the processes to make sure that the client and organization which is going to implement the solution, both are on the same page.

Workflow concepts are closely related to other concepts used to describe organizational structure, such as silos, functions, teams, projects, policies and hierarchies. Workflows may be viewed as one primitive building block of organizations.

-Source: Wikipedia

Once all these steps have been taken care of, we start with the actual tool implementation.

Enterprise Collaboration Solutions at SoftProdigy

SoftProdigy has gained expertise in setting up Intranets and Portal solutions using SharePoint and LifeRay system within the organization as well as for its clients. Not limited to implementing these systems within an organization only, the company has been using these tools to develop solutions which find their implementation in various industry domains like: banking, mobile computing etc.

One of the solution delivered was for a leading wireless M2M solutions provider for ATM management. The engagement was to develop a Business Portal for the various users of the company inside and the customers outside the company. The solution was developed on LifeRay as the technical feasibility was a major constraint. The application also needed to comply with the PCI-DSS Security Guidelines. The platform was created and delivered successfully, completed the Business Requirements.

About the Author

Rahul Joshi

Rahul Joshi is a Lead Business System Analyst with more than 8 years of experience in the IT industry. Started his career as a Software Engineer, he has worked extensively on front-end development technologies like: Flash and Flex. After moving into business analysis, he has been supporting clients from varied industry domains with technical consulting, focusing on areas like: Mobile Development, Rich Internet Applications and Gaming.

About SoftProdigy

Founded in 2006, SoftProdigy is an award-winning organization with expertise in the areas of Web & Mobile Technologies and Consulting services. Over the last few years, the organization has made a reputation for building quality solutions for its clients that helped them get more out of their business. SoftProdigy's customers range from start-ups to Enterprises like: ING, Aviva, Vodafone and Bajaj. The company has worked with entrepreneurs as well as established corporate houses across the globe to put their ideas into inception and take it to the market. It employs over 150 technology and management professionals who work closely with each other. With a consistent growth track record that has surpassed the industry trends year on year since the company's inception, what sets it apart is the philosophy of pursuing, quoted as "measured success".

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