

Critical Mission

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FEATURED ARTICLE

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Collaboration in Office 365 Makes Teams More Efficient, Effective

Expected to do more with less? We all feel the pressure in this challenging economy. Personal productivity has never been more critical to your company's bottom line, and with SharePoint it's never been easier to get team members working together more efficiently and effectively. If your business procedures involve multiple people or the same person juggles multiple processes, you should leverage the amazing productivity and collaboration features found in SharePoint.

Doing More with Less

Recent advances in Microsoft's SharePoint server along with tight integration with the rest of the Office family of products makes it possible to accomplish more useful work while minimizing or even eliminating many of the boring and tedious activities that groups of people must endure when trying to work together on complex projects or processes.

Do you find yourself e-mailing copies of files to co-workers, who do the same to you in return? Are you manually copy + pasting changes between versions of documents? Do you find yourself repeating the same simple actions over and over? How about scanning lists, looking for changes that indicate you need to

take action? These activities might be critical to your job but they're getting in the way of actually accomplishing something useful.

Let's take a quick look at SharePoint features that make collaboration much more efficient.

Workflow Automation

SharePoint document libraries and lists can have one or more workflows attached that react to changes and perform tasks. For example, a workflow that watches for a new "Request for Bid" document to be created and sets in motion a series of process tracking and task activities, and another workflow that reacts to the document status changing from "in-process" to "completed" and moves the process to the next step.

SharePoint workflows don't require programming and are created and maintained through a free tool called SharePoint Designer. Workflows can use IF-THEN logic to make decisions, perform calculations, create tasks and change data values, just to name a few of the supported actions. If your workflows become more complex than the tool can handle, a fully programmable alternative is available for serious software developers.

Document Workspaces

It's rare that collaboration on a complex document or business process exists in total isolation. Typically you'll keep track of the people working together, meetings, due dates, tasks, supporting documents, draft versions, and possibly links to resources. Rather than keeping all of this in your head, or scattering the information among numerous uncoordinated lists, a document workspace brings *all* information together in one place.

Products in the Office family, like Word and Excel, are aware of document workspaces and bring the SharePoint lists and associated features directly into

the document editing environment as fully interactive productivity boosters.

Offline File Synchronization

SharePoint Workspace is a new feature in SharePoint 2010 that makes it easy for multiple people to work simultaneously on the same Office documents, even when *offline* and unable to connect to the portal. When your computer is back online the synchronization process merges your changes with others to form an up-to-date version of the shared file. This is all done transparently.

A Share Workspace makes it possible for team members to work from any location and not be limited to groups in the same physical location.

Automatic Alerts

Any SharePoint document library or list offers a variety of automated alerts when something changes, making it easy to stay on top of projects and processes. Each alert is highly customizable for the person receiving alerts. For example, a high-level manager might want to see a weekly digest of all new project starts while a team leader might want immediate notifications any time an item's status changes. With SharePoint alerts you don't waste time manually scanning lists looking for changes or bothering team members for status updates.

Getting Started: Fast and Inexpensive

You don't need to wait for your I.T. infrastructure to catch up with your business needs. With the newly released Office 365 you can get a SharePoint Online portal up and running "in the cloud" in a matter of minutes for any size team, at only five bucks per person per month. Gain all the benefits of a SharePoint team collaboration solution, including integration with your local disk drives, without having the SharePoint server on premise. Low fixed per-person pricing makes SharePoint Online predictable to budget, easy to afford. We'll demonstrate SharePoint Online in the briefing.

Summary

Teams are more productive, efficient and effective when you leverage the collaboration features built into SharePoint.

If you're curious about Office 365 specifically or online services in general and want to learn more, Alto offers a training class designed to get you up to speed, fast on the concepts and address all your questions and concerns. <http://www.altotraining.com>

Contact Alto if you'd like a demonstration of any of the products or techniques discussed in this article. Our next webinar is devoted to these concepts.