Introduction to SharePoint Technologies

Microsoft SharePoint 2007 is the next stage in the evolution of the Microsoft SharePoint technology platform. This platform acts as the foundation of the 2007 Microsoft Office system. The 2007 Microsoft Office system is comprised of a collection of applications, servers, and services that work together to improve user and team productivity, make information sharing more effective, and facilitate business decision-making processes.

The 2007 Microsoft Office system includes many of Microsoft's products such as SharePoint Server 2007, Windows SharePoint Services 3.0, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Project Server, Forms Server, Live Communications Server, and many others. These applications and servers are designed to work together to meet the following goals:

- Provide business users with faster, comprehensive access to information. This includes not only making more information available but also making it possible to more easily locate available information that is most relevant to a business user's needs.

- Enable individuals to work together effectively and allow them to easily share information; this includes all individuals regardless of location.

- Improve individual and team productivity by making it easy to create and manage information and allowing this information to be available as part of related business processes.

The 2007 Microsoft Office system technologies are combined to create information worker solutions. Information workers are individuals that use information to support business processes or make business decisions. This information may exist as documents, e-mail messages, system data, reports, analytics, or any other format. Information worker solutions are business solutions, including both systems and processes, that enhance collaboration, make information more available, and improve productivity. These solutions enable rapid and informed business decisions to be made.

Microsoft SharePoint 2007 technologies are core components of the 2007 Microsoft Office system framework and provide the foundation on which information worker solutions are built.

What Is Microsoft SharePoint 2007?

Microsoft SharePoint 2007 is the central information sharing and collaboration platform for the 2007 Microsoft Office system. SharePoint 2007 is made up of two main products: Windows Share-Point Services 3.0 and SharePoint Server 2007. Windows SharePoint Services 3.0 (WSS) is a set of add-on services for the Microsoft Windows Server platform (Windows 2003 and later). WSS includes the resources necessary to build information management and collaboration solutions. WSS also provides the foundation of SharePoint 2007, including web-based document management, team collaboration, and information sharing capabilities, and is the platform used for developing information worker solutions.

Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 (MOSS) extends the capabilities provided by WSS through the introduction of an integrated set of services that allow organizations to create enterprise business solutions. These solutions are used to bring together people, information, systems, and business processes. MOSS provides enterprise-level document and records management, extended workflow capabilities, extranet and Internet portal templates, enterprise-wide search capabilities, personalized content and alerting, and extended application integration.

Evolution of SharePoint

Microsoft's SharePoint technology was first introduced in 2001 with the release of SharePoint Portal Server 2001. This product provided some basic tools designed to allow users to publish and find documents. It allowed for the creation and management of document taxonomies and represented the first step in providing a way to catalog and search for documents across the enterprise. Microsoft next released SharePoint Team Services, which extended the document and publishing capabilities of SharePoint Portal Server 2001 by providing information collaboration. This allowed groups of individuals to work together to manage documents and lists of information, such as contact lists, event lists, and link lists.

In 2003, Microsoft completely rearchitected SharePoint and released Windows SharePoint Services 2.0 and SharePoint Portal Server 2003 as part of the introduction of the first Microsoft Office system. The focus of these technologies was to provide a foundation for the collection of applications, servers, and services that work together to improve user and team productivity. These products allowed organizations to introduce a variety of business solutions that would have previously been very difficult and costly to create and maintain.

With the release of the 2007 Microsoft Office system, which includes SharePoint Server 2007 and Windows SharePoint Services 3.0, Microsoft has extended the Office System vision by including capabilities to support the creation of business solutions for the extended enterprise. These solutions are designed to maximize employee efficiency, enable decision making, and incorporate customers and partners into business processes. SharePoint 2007 includes all of the capabilities previously provided in SharePoint 2003 and the content management capabilities previously provided by Microsoft Content Management Server 2002. It also includes additional capabilities that add full business information management, workflow, extranet/Internet support, and business integration services.

Why Is It Valuable?

SharePoint 2007, including both SharePoint Server 2007 and Windows SharePoint Services 3.0, provides an information sharing platform, document management platform, workflow platform, business process management framework, and development foundation on which information worker solutions can be created. The building blocks needed to create comprehensive business solutions are available and can be easily assembled to support organizations' information management needs and business processes.

In today's work environment, information management and business processes are often very "people centric." Organizations rely on individuals' knowledge of available information and on manual business processes to address many needs. This causes organizations to become reliant on specific individuals to complete certain tasks and makes it difficult to allow others to participate in these areas. In this model, finding information is challenging. Individuals without knowledge of information that is available will often require a significant amount of time to find necessary information or will, in some cases, re-create materials already available. Trying to build solutions to simplify and automate business processes and the information management environment can be costly and difficult to create and maintain.

With the introduction of SharePoint 2007, Microsoft has provided tools to help simplify information management, collaboration, and business process automation. By leveraging Office system technologies, including SharePoint 2007, organizations are able to create business solutions in a more timely and cost-effective manner.

What Are the Building Blocks?

Windows SharePoint Services 3.0 and SharePoint Server 2007 include many tools that can be combined to create a variety of business solutions:

- Sites and workspaces provide a central location to securely consolidate related information of various types and to organize this information to conform to the business needs it supports.

- Libraries and lists allow users to manage documents and other types of information.

- Workflows allow for managed information to be incorporated into business processes.

- Records management capabilities allow you to manage the full life cycles of documents.

- Alerts give users the ability to be notified when information has been added or changed.

- Web parts allow for existing information to be organized and presented appropriately and provide additional business logic and applications that can be incorporated into solutions.

- Navigation and search capabilities provide the resources necessary to find relevant information when it is needed.

- My Site and My Links allow you to create and manage your own personalized information and provide web spaces to share this information with others.

In this book, we will discuss these tools in depth, describe how they are used and describe how they can be combined into information worker solutions. In the first part of this book, Chapters 2 through 9, we will discuss the components that make up a SharePoint 2007 environment and provide you with the information necessary to effectively work with these components. In the second part of this book, Chapters 10 and 11, we will discuss some of the common solutions created within the SharePoint environment. The solutions we will focus our discussions around include the following:

- *Document management*: Often, the goal of a group of information workers is to create and manage documents. Whether these documents are business plans, budgets, sales presentations, or some other type of business materials, managing the creation and publishing of these items is critical to the success of the business processes they support. Individuals working on materials are often geographically disbursed with each needing the same level of access to the materials being created. This creation process also often includes an approval process before the items are considered final, and the final materials often need to be properly categorized and placed in a location where they can be easily referenced in the future.

- *Project management*: When teams are brought together to work on a project, the management of the project significantly impacts its success. All aspects of the project, including the process, communications, deliverables, timelines, and tasks, need to be properly managed to ensure the success of the project. All interested parties, including team members, stakeholders, and managers, need visibility into the progress of the project and all associated resources.