Proposal for SharePoint Implementation  
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“I think when people look back on what we’re doing with Office here, the most revolutionary element will be what we’re doing with SharePoint.... [T]he whole way that people think about information sharing, both within the company and outside the company, I think will be reshaped by the SharePoint platform.”  
-Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft

Introduction

Collaboration is an integral part of the work day for employees at United Supply Company, and as we continue to grow and add new locations, our ability to collaborate will directly affect how smoothly we operate as a company. Many of the technology solutions that have been implemented over the past several years, including the establishment of a Windows-based network, the implementation of a robust phone system, and the recent purchase of an Exchange e-mail server, have enabled us to overcome many obstacles in our collaborative efforts.

While the solutions which are currently in place have greatly increased the efficiency by which we exchange information between individuals, we still lack a good way to share information in a centralized location. In other words, we are now better equipped to pass along information to one another, but we still lack an effective means to store and access it.

Microsoft Windows SharePoint Services 3.0 (WSS) offers an affordable and scalable solution to meet many collaboration needs, ranging all the way from facilitating project management to developing a streamlined process for reporting and reviewing expenses. SharePoint takes advantage of the already-familiar web interface, making for an easy-to-use environment with a low learning curve. Furthermore, security is provided at the user and item level so that employees only see what they need to see. SharePoint can take our collaboration efforts to the next level by centralizing the way we share and access information.

Identifying the Immediate Need: ePIC Implementation

Our transition to ePIC will occur on many levels, most of which will require employees to work together on a regular basis. At the managerial level, the project administrator will coordinate with individuals responsible for the various areas of implementation, ranging from meeting hardware requirements to developing a training program for warehouse staff. Monitoring and updating the progress of many tasks in one place adds greater visibility to the entire project.

In addition to top-level planning, we will need to maintain a list of requested changes, bugs, and features, all of which carry their own history and degree of
importance. *Maintaining a centralized list,* rather than constantly distributing and updating lists over a geographically disconnected user base, adds greater continuity and integrity to information by ensuring all users’ contributions are addressed and monitored in a timely fashion.

As ePIC grows and is modified incrementally, so will the way in which we tweak our operations to best utilize the features that make our business more efficient. In this evolving atmosphere, providing a means to easily change and modify policies and procedures in one place across the network will increase the consistency of our business operations in a geographically separated environment.

In addition to addressing the collaboration concerns of the above examples, SharePoint Services provides a flexible platform to address many of the *immediate* collaboration issues which will arise during the implementation of ePIC.

**Long-term Solutions with SharePoint**

While SharePoint Services certainly attends to immediate collaboration needs, the long-term solutions possible on the SharePoint platform are virtually endless. SharePoint is the vehicle by which we can transform the complicated paper trail of everyday office procedures into a centralized flow of information.

Examples of long-term solutions range from creating a searchable knowledge-base for customer service to converting all company forms into an electronic interface that can be accessed from anywhere in the company. The simple yet powerful collaborative foundation of SharePoint Services offers a good starting point for bringing these ideas into reality. If we were to discover that SharePoint proves a viable option in effecting positive change to the way we do business, we might then find it beneficial to explore more robust solutions within the Microsoft Office family of products that add tighter integration with our current information technology infrastructure. The implementation of this *long-term* model, which could accommodate strategic changes for making our internal operations more efficient, is not necessary to begin taking advantage of the many advanced features already available in SharePoint Services 3.0.

**The Next Step: Introducing SharePoint to Our Organization**

The best way to see what SharePoint can do to meet our collaboration needs is to start using it. There are many ways to begin using SharePoint, several of which are outlined below:
**Purchase Hardware to Run In-House**

**Cost**
- Bare Minimum: $1500 for a basic server
- Realistic Estimate: $5,000 to $10,000 minimum for a small server farm with integrated hard-drive back-up.

**Pros**
- Hosting SharePoint in-house provides increased control and an added level of integration within our Windows network.
- Monthly fees are avoided, which can increase as utilization of the product increases.

**Cons**
- In addition to the large up-front costs, we are relying entirely on ourselves to set it up.
- Without external consulting on how to best use the product, we might not experience as large of a return on our investment.
- In order to get even a feel for the product, we would need to make a very large investment.

**Hire a Company to Host the Site**

**Cost**
- Free to Try
- Minimum: $40/month (approx.) for hosting with a reliable and stable company for 40-50 users.
- Entire Company: $60-$70/month to accommodate up to 100 users.

**Pros**
- The greatest immediate advantage to a hosted SharePoint solution is the low cost in trying it out.
- There’s no hardware to purchase and all the setup is taken care of.
- Backup, redundancy, and restoration are handled externally in the rare event of system failure.
- Knowledgeable SharePoint specialists are available to assist in gaining an introduction to the product.
- You don’t need to worry about overloading your current servers because the application is hosted off-site.

**Cons**
- There’s not as much integration with your current Windows network when you use a hosted solution.
- You don’t have absolute control over your website.
- Monthly fees could become costly if this were to become a long-term solution for many of our business needs.
**Hire a Consulting Firm to Guide us Step-by-Step in Implementing SharePoint**

### Cost
- Undetermined at this time

### Pros
- We gain an immediate, face-to-face relationship, ensuring not only that SharePoint is set up correctly, but that we utilize the product to its full potential.
- We receive detailed consulting and follow-up if we decide down the road to integrate fully with the Microsoft Office System.
- If we start using SharePoint to replace antiquated business procedures, someone is there to help with any bumps in the road during the transition process.

### Cons
- The upfront cost is higher than simply buying hardware and installing it yourself.
- This plan of action requires a certain readiness to implement sweeping changes across the enterprise. Given the amount of change we have already, we are probably not ready to give serious attention to a long-term implementation of SharePoint that would require a modification to our internal operations strategy.

**Recommendation**

To begin using SharePoint immediately and see how it can be utilized to enhance the way in which we collaborate, I recommend beginning by using a hosted solution with minimum upfront costs. Because of its low learning curve, we will be able to see very quickly the power of this product and its potential for our business. After we have had time to evaluate SharePoint in a low-cost environment, we may find that SharePoint could prove beneficial in making more efficient many of our current business processes, in which case we might choose to hire a consulting company to assist in establishing a fully-integrated SharePoint solution.

Two companies I have investigated for SharePoint hosting are:

- Apptix ([www.sharepointsite.com](http://www.sharepointsite.com))
- Alentus ([www.alentus.com](http://www.alentus.com))

Both companies have a free trial period and have been in the web-hosting industry since 1997. Their packages are similar in price and vary slightly in the details. Both hosting companies offer similar upgrade paths to accommodate more users and disk space. Pricing details are laid out below and more information is available at their respective web sites.
Regarding SharePoint consulting, I have already spoken with a representative at the following Charlotte-based company:

- Ettain Group ([www.ettaingroup.com](http://www.ettaingroup.com))

Ettain Group has a lot to offer as far as providing an introduction to the power of SharePoint as a long-term investment. I have spoken with one of their representatives on the phone, and she said their company can come to our branch to host a luncheon and demonstrate SharePoint’s capabilities. This would be a good place to start if we were to decide to look at SharePoint as a long-term solution.

**Conclusion**

Microsoft SharePoint Services 3.0 provides an immediate collaboration solution as we proceed with our implementation of ePIC. Going with a hosting company for a low-cost introduction to the product will allow us to address an immediate need now as well as get a feel for what this product can do for us long-term. If it appears that SharePoint could in fact become a viable asset to our company, we can then look into options that may require a greater upfront infrastructure investment.