

SharePoint Managed Services: How to Make SharePoint Work for You



Introduction

Imagine all of your important company announcements are being stored in a single location, reducing the amount of mail flowing into your inbox. Processes are completely automated generating free time that you can dedicate to more important tasks such as fulfilling the strategic vision of your organization. Collaboration among employees has increased dramatically as everyone has access to communicate within and outside of the organization at any time. You easily keep up-to-date with every department on a regular basis through your company social network.

This can be your new reality.

Utilizing SharePoint to its full potential will enable this world and more to become a reality, it's simply a matter of connecting all the right dots.

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SECTION 1: Managing SharePoint:

How to determine if this platform is right for you.

You have Microsoft SharePoint, now what? Do you feel you are using it to its' full potential? Perhaps your IT team has implemented the application, but finds it extremely cumbersome and time-consuming to maintain in-house. Maybe you're at a crossroads. Either you invest in enhancing your team's SharePoint proficiency level or you look into utilizing a SharePoint Managed Services Provider.

Consider the following when determining whether to engage with a managed services provider:

Let's do some self-analysis

You know how your business operates. Within your organization, do you tend to keep every element of your IT environment in-house, or do you see the value in utilizing an external resource? Take the time to decide how you envision the future of your organization before shopping around for a managed services provider. Your company must be ready to adopt the changes the experts suggest to ensure a positive transition occurs into managed services.

A big factor in determining whether or not to work with a managed services provider is the size of your organization. If you have just a handful of end-users using the platform, then chances are using a managed services provider will not be worth the investment. In that same regard, with tens of thousands of users, it is probably best to invest in your internal team who better understands the internal structure and cultural dynamics of your organization. Typically, the sweet spot lies between 100s and 1000s of users.

Managing SharePoint

First things first, take some time and see if you're a good fit.

Managed Services Quiz

Answer the following questions to see if using a managed services provider is right for you. Remember to keep your organization's needs and culture in mind as you answer the following questions:

Does your IT staff wear pagers? Are any of them on call all of the time? (Or do they feel that way)?

YES NO

Does it impact your business productivity when key IT staff are sick or on vacation?

YES NO

Would the loss of an IT staff member impact your business?

YES NO

Is your IT staff well trained to utilize the SharePoint platform to its full potential?

YES NO

Does your staff hold numerous certifications that enable them to stay up-to-date with the latest updates for SharePoint?

YES NO

Are you confident your IT staff makes informed and effective technology choices for your business?

YES NO

Are you able to ensure IT staff only has access to systems and data for which they've been approved?

YES NO

Is your staff spending too much of their time firefighting day-to-day problems instead of focusing on projects that are strategically moving your company forward?

YES NO

Are your IT costs continually increasing?

YES NO

Is it difficult for you to find and retain quality IT talent?

YES NO

Answer "yes" to one or more of the questions? You may be the perfect candidate for managed services.

Deep Dive Weighing the Costs.

There are always pros and cons to consider, so you must determine what best suits your specific business needs. For example, you may consider adding a SharePoint specialist or two to your team, but what happens when those individuals get sick or go on vacation. Do you have enough available backup support? Perhaps a team of SharePoint experts that collectively never get sick or go on vacation would be a better option. If you're considering employing a full-time DBA—and the typical six-figure salary and benefits that come with that hire—would it be more economical to engage a scalable team that offers a broad collection of knowledge and expertise?

Tried and Tested. From remote management, site collection reporting and scheduled backups to real-time monitoring, migration services and 24/7 support, SharePoint Managed Services Providers are making big promises. Of course, promising and doing are two different things.

As you may have already experienced, any number of random errors and inconsistencies can occur within SharePoint and cause an outage. The actions you take to resolve the outage can either fix the issues present or further break the environment.

While you consider your jump to utilizing an external provider, be sure to do your due diligence and examine the provider's track record. Sure, ask the provider for case studies. More than that, research how well they utilize SharePoint within their own organization. Do they just talk the talk but not walk the walk? And what's the breadth of their experience? Are they SharePoint specialists, or are they equipped to address issues that may arise outside of the SharePoint platform?

Square Peg, Square Hole. Your company is unique. Other companies may play in your space, but your organizational DNA makes you different from the rest. You must determine if a managed services provider can understand and fully grasp your makeup. Are they flexible enough to create an implementation and management plan that fits your needs or would your organization have to conform to their model? How much time and energy are they willing to invest in understanding your business model?

Just as important, though, is knowing how much you want them to invest in learning about your business. While an external vendor can help you identify blind spots in your business, you may not be looking for that level of comprehensive consulting. If you spend time identifying your needs and distinct characteristics, finding a solution that understands and meets your needs will be simpler—whether that be an in-house resource or an external managed services provider.

SECTION 2: Evaluating SharePoint:

Is SharePoint making your work life easier or harder?

While SharePoint can be a powerful tool for your organization, it can also be more cumbersome than supportive at times. It doesn't have to be. You can and should make the platform work for your unique business needs.

- 1. Fixes, Upgrades and Outages.** SharePoint isn't immune to Murphy's Law*. Errors happen and outages occur. Are you prepared to address these occurrences when they arise? Better yet, are you able to get ahead of these situations by proactively monitoring key areas of SharePoint?

A managed services provider can be beneficial in helping you realize greater business value from SharePoint by responding to and anticipating issues before they occur. For example, when a new version of SharePoint is released or critical security patches go live, an external SharePoint expert may be able to better understand the complexities and nuances of installing these updates and migrating your data. The experts can also reduce or eliminate errors within SharePoint by proactively monitoring your platform. For instance, managed services providers constantly track database capacity, disk usage and page load times, and beyond, and then make the necessary adjustments before a site goes down. They can also establish and run scheduled backups so data can be restored when outages occur, and can then run trending reports to identify impending critical issues.

**Murphy's Law: Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong.*

2. Hide and Go Seek. Making data easy to locate within SharePoint depends on the way you structure and organize your content. The search functionality must be built out to fit your business needs. According to SharePoint MVP Michael Pisarek, consumers and end users do not search the same way. Instead, “different rules apply, and there are different expectations about security, performance and especially context.”

To ensure search works for your business and to increase the adoption rate by your users, time must be spent examining your users' search needs and the ways in which they seek out data. A managed services provider that understands SharePoint's search functionality—including enhancements such as the custom content processing and the new framework for presenting search result types—can fully assess your company's search strategies and create customized content sources.

3. Training Opps. You made a substantial investment to implement SharePoint within your business, so how do you get your workforce to regularly and effectively utilize the solution? Like anything else, users must know how to use it and understand the benefits they will receive. Once users begin to capture and apply SharePoint's powerful capabilities, they'll wonder how they ever survived without it.

A qualified managed services provider can increase your internal adoption rate by designing a comprehensive training program that's built around your users' particular needs, which can conveniently be delivered onsite or online. How-to training and walkthrough videos generically present material that cover common scenarios most users encounter. Managed services providers can take that up a notch by developing a customized training solution that examines real-life scenarios within your company. In the end, your IT staff and end users can get answers to their specific situations and learn how to better leverage SharePoint within their unique environments.

SECTION 3: SharePoint Toolbox:

What tools should you be using to foster collaboration?

Every organization isn't inherently collaborative, which means that sometimes teamwork needs to be fostered. The SharePoint platform can help remove employees from their silos and increase efficiencies through teamwork. Creating automated processes and the parameters around those processes can do just that—if they're designed around the unique needs of the group and individual users who will be utilizing them.



1. Flow of Work. Every organization has common business practices related to certain tasks, such as the way documents are reviewed and approved internally. The workflow features within SharePoint offer automatic control of the progression of these documents through a predefined process. And while several standard workflows exist out of the box, having a managed services provider manage custom workflows that include logic, for example, can provide even greater efficiencies and productivity. By allowing staff to focus on the tasks at hand and not the management of the tasks, you can take a step in the right direction.

2. Rules of Play. Once SharePoint is implemented, establishing the guidelines for how it will be used within your organization is key. You want SharePoint to do what it's intended to do—establish an environment that allows your staff to easily find, create, publish, and share information with others—but you also want to make sure that certain guardrails are set up to keep SharePoint working for everyone.

A managed services provider can accomplish this by establishing and implementing a SharePoint Governance Guide that defines how the system operates, who within your organization has access to what levels and the necessary equipment to keep it operational. Establishing this process and determining protocols that work for specific groups can enhance security and increase the development of a collaborative environment. Just make sure you have a provider who can properly manage the power within SharePoint's governance features. The more granular you make the permissions, the greater the risk of potential headaches.

3. The Shell Game. Time is what everyone always seems to be lacking. With SharePoint, you can help give your company time back which can be utilized in better ways. SharePoint's PowerShell command console and scripting language can help by automating many recurring activities your staff might otherwise do manually. For example, manual processes such as setting up team sites reduce development time and mitigate errors. But here again, PowerShell's power can be very helpful and very dangerous if it is not harnessed properly. If you and your internal team do not have experience with PowerShell, a skilled managed services provider may be the best option for managing scripts.

Conclusion

To receive the most value and gain the greatest ROI, you need both the manpower and the brainpower to manage your Microsoft SharePoint solution. Sometimes the resources exist in-house and other times you need to leverage the resources of an experienced consulting firm. It is time to make sure that SharePoint is working for you. Now that you fully understand the value of both sides of the equation, what's your next step?

Apparatus has designed its managed services offering from the ground up, offering 24/7 technical support that keeps environments operating at peak levels. With certified Microsoft SharePoint IT professionals and developers—both Microsoft Certified Professional Developers (MCPD) and Microsoft Certified IT Professionals (MCITP)—the Apparatus SharePoint team offers a vast collection of services, including infrastructure design, deployment, webpage design and business intelligence consulting.

Want to learn more about SharePoint Managed Services?
Email us at solutions@apparatus.net.

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