

Crossing the Chasm to User Adoption of ECM Applications in SharePoint

Intended Audience

This whitepaper is intended for CEOs, CIOs, directors or VPs of IT, records managers, chief compliance officers, and anyone interested in strategies and techniques for ensuring a high level of user adoption and success of their Enterprise Content Management (ECM) system.

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction – The Technology Adoption Lifecycle and the Chasm	1
Organizational Benefits of Using SharePoint for ECM	3
User Expectations	4
The Chasm	6
The Solution for Crossing the SharePoint ECM Adoption Chasm	7
Delivering a Whole Solution	8
Conclusion	9

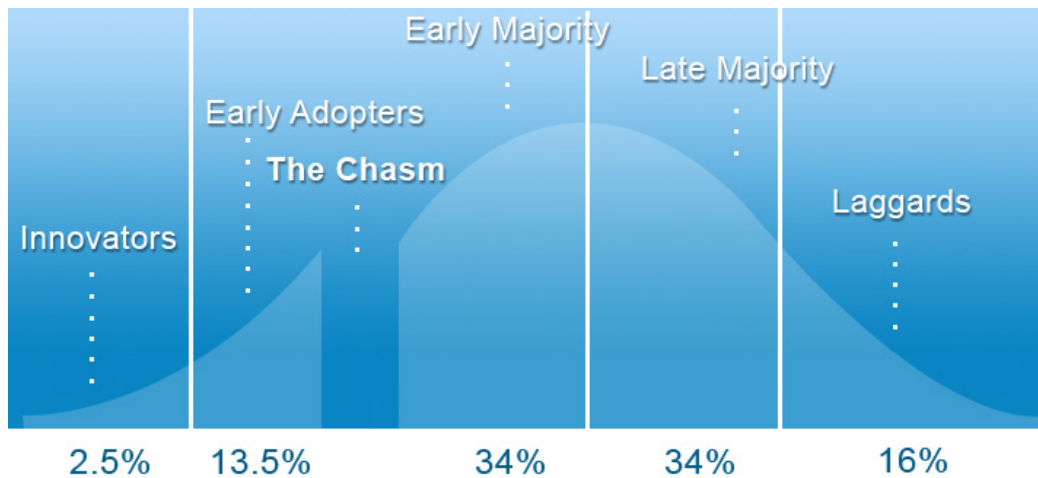
Executive Summary

An organization’s adoption of SharePoint, like any disruptive technology, is governed by the same Technology Adoption Lifecycle referenced by Geoffrey Moore in his book “Crossing the Chasm.” Driving the use of SharePoint beyond the innovators and early adopters to the majority of pragmatic users in an organization requires both strategies and tools to gain wide-scale user acceptance and adoption. Add-on solutions for SharePoint are essential to help organizations to “cross the chasm” of end user adoption by ensuring that users are fully engaged, enthusiastic, and productive with the ECM system.

Introduction – The Technology Adoption Lifecycle and the Chasm

The Technology Adoption Lifecycle is a well-known concept, developed in the 1950’s by Joe M. Bohlen, George M. Beal, and Everett M. Rogers at Iowa State University, that describes how new innovations are adopted. The [original research](#) examined how farmers in Iowa adopted new ideas, and concluded that people fit broadly into five categories depending on their willingness to incorporate technology into their daily lives: innovators, early adopters, early majority, majority, and non-adopters. They observed that the distribution of the population along this lifecycle approximated a normal bell curve. One of the key observations reported was that new technologies and business processes gain widespread acceptance only after winning the support of pragmatic, mainstream customers. It was not enough just to have the innovators accept it.

In 1991, Geoffrey Moore published a seminal book called “[Crossing the Chasm](#)”. The book, primarily written for technology marketers in start-up companies, examined the adoption rates of disruptive technologies. Moore had observed that, despite having the enthusiastic support of innovators and early adopters, new technologies often fail to gain wide acceptance because pragmatic customers, who represent 84% of the market (according to a bell curve distribution), have very different expectations than innovators. He called this gap in expectations “the chasm” as shown in the diagram below.



The Technology Adoption Lifecycle As Revised by Moore

According to the Wikipedia entry for “Crossing the Chasm”:

“The most difficult step is making the transition between visionaries (early adopters) and pragmatists (early majority). This is the chasm that [Moore] refers to. If a successful firm can create a bandwagon effect in which enough momentum builds, then the product becomes a de facto standard. However, Moore’s theories are only applicable for disruptive or discontinuous innovations. Adopting continuous innovations (that do not force a significant change of behavior by the customer) is still best described by the original technology adoption lifecycle. **Confusion between continuous and discontinuous innovation is a leading cause of failure for high tech products.**”

In many ways, the introduction of a new application of SharePoint into an organization is similar to the introduction of a new product to a market. SharePoint delivers a rich set of functions for creating, managing, and sharing content through a secure framework that can facilitate collaboration and manage compliance and policies. SharePoint can change the way an organization manages its information and work processes to such a dramatic extent that it is a disruptive technology.

SharePoint end users behave much like the customers of a new technology. Since they create, store, and access most of the content in SharePoint, a successful deployment depends on them enthusiastically adopting the new application. According to Microsoft, “ECM systems rely on one key dependency more than technology, feature set, or amount of information managed: *user adoption*.”*

However, high user adoption is difficult to achieve in practice. A recent Colligo survey of over 750 SharePoint professionals showed that less than half are satisfied or very satisfied with the level of user adoption of SharePoint in their organizations, while about the same number feel user adoption could be improved.

Of course, achieving high user adoption is easier said than done. Just like any population, users in an organization will fall into the five categories along the Technology Adoption Lifecycle. It follows that, in order to gain widespread acceptance of a new SharePoint application, it is critical to consider not just the innovators, but the needs of the pragmatists, who constitute the majority of end users.

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* “The Business Value of Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010 Enterprise Content Management”, Microsoft whitepaper

In our work with thousands of customers since 2006, Colligo has observed that SharePoint projects can fail if implementers do not provide the right tools to meet the unique needs of pragmatic end users. While deploying SharePoint out-of-the-box may be met with the enthusiastic support of early adopters, ultimately the project may fall into the chasm because the pragmatic majority isn't engaged. In the end, they will continue to perform their tasks in the same way they always have.

Over the years, we have worked with many customers to ensure the success of their SharePoint deployments. What they share is a recognition that different users have different requirements and have designed their solution to meet these unique requirements.

Organizational Benefits of Using SharePoint for ECM

The growth of the Internet, email, and social media, coupled with the drive to go “paperless”, has created an explosion of electronic content. Much of this content is unmanaged, residing in personal email files (PSTs), thumb drives, hard drives, and network shares. This can pose significant threats to an organization, as these “information silos” represent legal risk, and making it difficult to share knowledge will hinder an organization's effectiveness. As a result, enterprises increasingly recognize the need to centrally manage documents through their entire lifecycle, from creation to disposition.

In addition to traditional document management capabilities, SharePoint integrates collaboration and social capabilities, such as collaboration workspaces, wikis, blogs, rich media, business process workflows, and forms. This provides a rich platform for users to create and access content, and for organizations to manage it. Because information is created and shared through SharePoint, organizations can finally realize the dream of “Compliance Everywhere”, a term coined by Microsoft to signify that compliance tools, such as retention and legal holds, are available on all SharePoint lists and libraries. According to Microsoft:

“ ... ECM can and should be considered across the organization for any, and even all, types of documents and information. While some data should be securely stored in the vault, providing broader control to all content can help manage growing amounts of data and provide retention schedules. The alternative is unmanaged, exponential data growth, higher costs, and greater risk ... ” - The Business Value of Microsoft SharePoint 2010, Microsoft Whitepaper, 2010

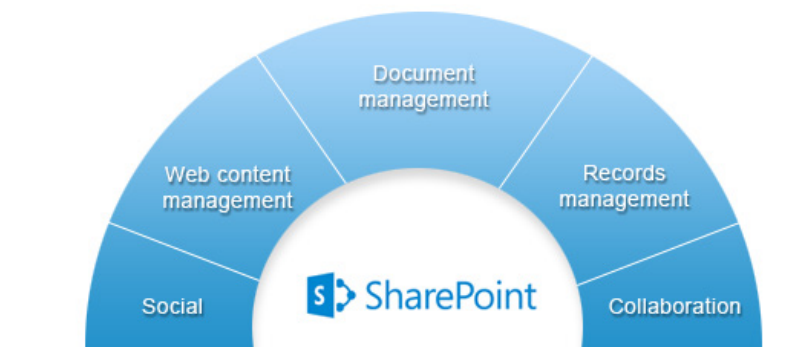
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SharePoint can have a profound impact on the value of an organization's information assets. In our work with customers, we have witnessed many success stories where enterprises have seen a significant increase in the amount of content being managed once SharePoint is deployed. Perhaps more importantly, using SharePoint also increases the quality of information. A significant benefit of SharePoint is its sophisticated metadata and taxonomy management capabilities; including the ability for end users to tag information at the time it is created, to improve classification.

In addition to the benefits of effective records management and eDiscovery preparedness, SharePoint's collaboration capabilities, coupled with sophisticated enterprise search tools, make information accessible to all who need it. This increases the organization's competitiveness and ability to deliver goods and services more effectively to its customers.

SharePoint can also represent a significant cost savings to an organization because it can replace multiple standard and bespoke solutions previously deployed for content management, records management, web content management, collaboration, and social. SharePoint is also available as a cloud service (Microsoft Office 365), which can offer significant cost savings in hardware and support infrastructure. Many organizations are now operating a hybrid SharePoint service, with some of their data on-premises and some of it in the cloud.

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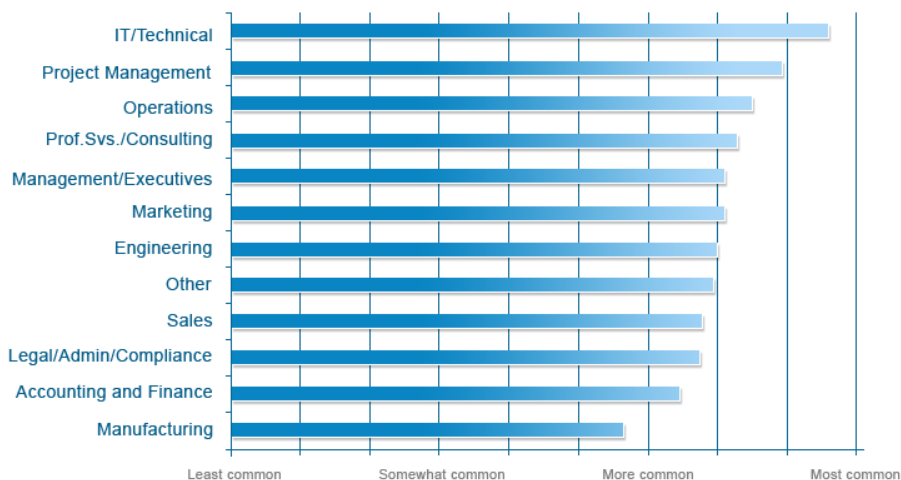
User Expectations

As mentioned earlier, people fall into several categories depending on how they adopt technology. SharePoint adoption is no different. Early adopters tend to be among the first to pick up a new technology or business process because they (in Moore’s words) “find it easy to imagine, understand, and appreciate the benefits of a new technology, and to relate these potential benefits to their other concerns.” Early adopters are willing to work through the issues because they can see the benefits that SharePoint will bring to the organization and to them. They are *essential* to getting the adoption started.

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Who are the early adopters? The Colligo study mentioned earlier asked SharePoint professionals to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, the penetration of SharePoint into various departments in their organizations. The following chart shows the average results from 750 respondents for organizations ranging in size from SMBs to enterprises. Note that IT/Technical represents the highest penetration. While penetration is not always tied to adoption (for example, it could reflect those departments where applications were first deployed), this is indicative of the pattern we have seen across almost all organizations, regardless of how they are using SharePoint. IT and other technical areas usually represent the early adopters of SharePoint.

How commonly is SharePoint used in each of the following departments within your organization?



On the other side of Moore's chasm is the early majority. While they may be interested in new technologies, the early majority are pragmatists that prefer to wait for proof that the technologies work and will save them time. Professional services employees are often representative of the early majority. They understand the value of SharePoint to their business and want to use it because they recognize it will help them to be more productive. However, they will wait until many – but not all – of the kinks are worked out. The legal department is often in the late majority. They are not interested in adopting a new technology until it absolutely works, and they are not willing to spend a lot of time learning it. Of course there are early adopters in every department, but they are not the norm.

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Finding a way to win over the early and late majority is the key to high user adoption in a SharePoint ECM project. So what is their motivation to use SharePoint? In order to adopt it, users need to feel that it adds value to—not detracts from—their daily work. They ask, “What’s in it for me? Will using SharePoint help me to get my work done faster, work smarter, or get a promotion?” They are normally interested in helping their IT or records management colleagues to achieve their ECM goals only if it helps them to achieve their personal goals, but not if it slows them down.

Because there are so many people in the early and late majority, winning them over is the key to high user adoption in a SharePoint ECM project.

Users also have high expectations of what technology can do for them. People have a lot of choice in how they communicate share, access, and store information in their personal lives and they expect it to be the same at work. This is commonly referred to as the “consumerization of IT”.

The consumerization of IT has several components, including the explosion of mobile computing, the movement of enterprise software applications (and storage) to the cloud, and the growth of social networking. Users are no longer willing to accept the “walled garden” of the enterprise network or limits to their choice of devices and applications. Nor are they willing to fight with applications that are hard to use, just because “that’s the way we do it here.” The explosion of new devices and expectations of a younger demographic are creating challenges for the C-suite, and the IT department is expected to have solutions ready now.

Tablets, such as the iPad, are forcing enterprises to rethink their security policies and approach to application delivery. [According to Gartner](#), “The

consumerization trend has hit IT as an unstoppable force, as 821 million smart devices (smartphones and tablets) will be purchased worldwide in 2012 and pass the billion mark in 2013, according to Gartner, Inc.”

In addition to the freedom to use their own devices, employees are demanding access in the workplace to services that they use in their personal lives. Facebook is already commonplace at work, and cloud-based file sharing services, such as Dropbox or Google Docs, are becoming more popular. IT departments are very concerned about the inherent security risks and incompatibilities of these services and, if they have SharePoint, are trying to get their users to adopt it for file sharing instead.

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The Chasm

Have you ever experienced this?: The IT team spends months—or even years—designing and deploying an ECM application. Initially, there is a lot of enthusiasm and user participation is strong. There may be a few complaints about usability, but the initial uptake is so good that they don't seem critical to the success of the project. A few months later, things start to slow down and the complaints grow louder. Eventually momentum for the project stalls, hardly anyone uses it, and everyone starts looking for another solution.

This is a classic case of an ECM project that's fallen into the chasm. It should be obvious now why this occurs. The solution was developed by innovators and it's been enthusiastically accepted by early adopters. But the needs of the pragmatic user were not well anticipated and they perceive that it falls short of their expectations. So once it's gets out into the general population, it falls flat.

One of the insights in “Crossing the Chasm” is that the early majority do not use early adopters as references when making an adoption decision. According to Moore:

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“[Early adopters] expect radical discontinuity between the old ways and the new, and they are prepared to champion this cause against entrenched resistance. Being the first, they also are prepared to bear with the inevitable bugs and glitches that accompany any innovation ...

“By contrast, the early majority want to buy a productivity improvement for existing operations They want evolution, not revolution And above all, they do not want to debug somebody else's product

“ ... because of these incompatibilities, early adopters do not make good references for the early majority. And, because of the early majority's concern not to disrupt their organizations, good references are critical to their buying decisions. So what we have here is a catch-22. The only suitable reference for an early majority customer, it turns out, is another member of the early majority, but no upstanding member of the early majority will buy without first having consulted with several suitable references.”

But isn't this a thing of the past? Everyone knows that the requirements of end users need to be considered when developing a solution. And this kind of thing shouldn't happen with SharePoint. After all, SharePoint is known to be the most user-centric solution in the ECM market. It was designed to overcome many of the user adoption problems that plague other systems.

But, unfortunately, it does occur, even with SharePoint. The reason is that SharePoint is a *platform* for ECM. Although widely regarded as the best on the market, designed to be user-centric, and incorporating many features that enhance the user experience far beyond the competition, SharePoint was never designed to be a complete solution for all scenarios and all users.

Out of the box SharePoint has a single interface – the browser. Microsoft Office provides integration points with SharePoint and for some users this may be enough. But, there are many scenarios where the out of the box solution is not well suited to their work style or expectations.

Here are a few examples of scenarios that expose UI functionality gaps where SharePoint runs the risk of falling into the chasm:

- **Email Management:** Much of the data in an enterprise is contained in email, so it's logical to include emails in any ECM solution. Many users would prefer to access SharePoint from within Outlook, but it does not support records management functions such as email property extraction and metadata management.

- **Attachment Management:** Many companies would like to move users away from sending email attachments to sending links to documents in SharePoint, to reduce the size of email inboxes, facilitate collaboration, and ensure the files are in a managed environment. There is no direct support for this scenario in Microsoft Outlook.
- **Personal Document Management:** Many organizations would like to move files off of a user's desktop and into SharePoint to get them into a managed environment. In practice, this is challenging since users find tagging documents through the web interface a chore they will try to avoid. Plus while Microsoft Office provides some direct functionality, it's metadata capabilities are limited to Office documents. Poor connectivity and busy servers can also lead to long wait times and more frustration.
- **Mobile Document Management:** As mentioned, users now expect to access SharePoint from any device, regardless of manufacturer, plus mobile workers are often disconnected and need access to data offline. SharePoint is incompatible with browsers on some mobile devices. Accessing SharePoint through a wireless link can be a challenge. Third party applications are required to provide robust access to SharePoint on mobile devices.
- **File Sharing:** While SharePoint can be a good file sharing tool, there are several situations where this scenario presents a usability challenge. For example, organizations may choose to use a cloud service such as Office 365 to share files externally, but users can find it challenging to switch between on-premises SharePoint and Office 365 when remembering passwords and URLs, and navigating to the right location.

To achieve high adoption rates from the mainstream user, SharePoint solution designers need to consider usability at a granular level.

In these scenarios and others, there is a risk that a SharePoint ECM project could fall into the chasm if the needs and expectations of mainstream, pragmatic users are not considered. For early adopters, out-of-the-box SharePoint may be just fine. However, to achieve high adoption rates from the mainstream user, SharePoint solution designers need to consider usability at a granular level. One size does not fit all.

The Solution for Crossing the SharePoint ECM Adoption Chasm

Geoffrey Moore describes a “market development strategy checklist” that ensures pragmatic customers readily adopt new technologies. Many companies have followed this recipe and achieved great success in the market. Adapt this methodology to your company to achieve higher SharePoint adoption. SharePoint adoption checklist:

- **Target users:** gain a deep understanding of each target persona, including how they do their jobs now and how they will interact with the system once it's deployed.
- **Compelling reason to adopt:** build a value proposition for each target user that answers the question, “What's in it for me?” Using “day in the life” before and after scenarios can help to crystallize this.
- **Whole solution:** ensure that all elements of the solution are in place and able to deliver on the compelling reason to adopt, so the target users readily adopt the ECM solution.
- **Roll-out:** develop a deployment strategy and plan that focuses on communication, and incorporates extensive user feedback into the process.
- **Cost:** understand the real cost to the user of adopting the system. Ensure that the value delivered exceeds the “cost” to the user.
- **Competition:** understand the alternatives that the target users have if they choose not to adopt the new solution. For example, how much support is there from management to work through bugs found the initial phases?

Build a value proposition for each target user that answers the question, “What's in it for me?”

- **Positioning:** build and deliver messaging around the solution that communicates what the system is, who it's targeted at, the benefits it brings and how it differs from the old ways of working.

Implementing the steps above is specific to each SharePoint deployment. We will touch on a couple of key items here: target users and whole solution.

Target Users

Gathering the expectations of target users is a crucial first step. Their predisposition to “evolution, not revolution”, coupled with a desire to use consumer technology, often require that many expectations must be met before pragmatic users will integrate SharePoint into their daily work routine. Some of these expectations are:

1. Simple

- Set-up must be simple and quick
- Accessing SharePoint must be easy
- Emails must be as easy to work with as documents in SharePoint
- File sharing needs to be as easy as consumer file sharing services

2. Powerful

- SharePoint must integrate with existing business applications, such as Microsoft Outlook, not be presented as an alternative to them
- Search needs to be as easy and powerful as it is on the web
- Metadata needs to be easy, fast, and powerful to extract and apply
- The system must be able to take advantage of advanced SharePoint features such as workflows, to provide a better overall *solution*

3. Reliable

- SharePoint needs to work just as well on consumer and mobile devices as it does on Windows PCs
- Users need to be confident that they have access to their SharePoint content whether they are working online or offline
- The solution needs to be compatible with SharePoint customizations for ECM or social networking

4. Trusted

- The location of data (on-premises or in the cloud) should be secure and transparent to the user
- Enterprises should have the option to centrally manage the SharePoint locations available to each user
- SharePoint data and credentials cached on a user's machine should be encrypted and secure

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Delivering a Whole Solution

So how can organizations develop a whole solution for ECM in SharePoint? A whole solution consists of SharePoint, augmented by everything that is needed for the target user to have a compelling reason to adopt the system. The core of the solution is SharePoint, but without these additional components it would not be very well accepted by the target user. There are many examples of third-party solutions from Microsoft partners that extend SharePoint functionality in areas such as administration, workflow, or social networking. However, tools that enhance the user experience must also be considered with equal importance to functionality.

As mentioned earlier, SharePoint and Microsoft Office out-of-the-box provide an adequate solution for certain users; however, they do not fulfill all of the requirements for the majority in scenarios such as email and attachment management, personal document management, mobile document management, or file sharing. For those users SharePoint often needs to be supplemented by third party products to make it a whole solution that achieves its goals, including adoption.

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Conclusion

Ensuring the success of a SharePoint deployment requires “crossing the chasm” of end user adoption from the innovators and early adopters to the mainstream majority of pragmatic users in an organization. Winning over the mainstream majority requires strategies and tools to ensure a seamless integration of SharePoint into their normal work processes, applications and devices and to provide a positive answer to the end user question, “What’s in it for me?”

