



Betting on SharePoint

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You've probably heard that total sales of Microsoft's [SharePoint](#) online collaboration software are expected to surpass the \$1 billion mark in 2008, and as such is set to become one of the fastest-growing Microsoft technologies of all time. This is good news for the more than 2000 certified SharePoint integration partners who are betting on SharePoint to become the collaboration platform of choice for businesses of all sizes. I recently talked with representatives from one partner, [Syrinx Consulting](#), to get their take on some of the trends in the industry and challenges that companies face as they dive in to SharePoint or simply test out the waters.

Andrew Gelina, Syrinx CEO, said that his company's initial offering was large-scale Web developments. "Then we noticed early on that Microsoft was selling an awful lot of licenses around the SharePoint platform, that Microsoft had a winner on its hands, and that everyone was going to need services to get it implemented," he said. He was right, and Syrinx moved into the SharePoint consulting arena. And with the skyrocketing uptake of Windows SharePoint Services (WSS) 3.0 and Microsoft Office SharePoint [Server](#) (MOSS) 2007 over the last year and a half, that path has proven to be a good choice.

"What's happening is that the business folks are clamoring for SharePoint and the IT folks are so overworked that often they're hesitant to take on a new platform. But with the people who use it, it grows like a weed. They start to get familiar with the platform, see its potential, and put pressure on [IT departments](#) to make it do more. That's why our business is taking off in this area. It's a difficult platform to master, and companies are outsourcing a lot of the work."

According to Ryan Thomas, Director of SharePoint Practice for Syrinx, one of the first aspects of SharePoint that companies are jumping on board with is collaboration. Because of free versions and licensing agreements, many companies already have SharePoint inhouse and are looking for quick ways to implement it. "Collaboration seems, on the surface, to be one of the easiest applications to get up and running," he said. "Many of our clients have offices around the globe, they have file shares, email, important documents, and lots of data floating around that they can't easily track. SharePoint brings to the table a centralized location to consolidate and backup this data--a place where users can [communicate](#) and collaborate using discussion forums, segmented off project areas where they can work on specific tasks, and a one shot view into what their working on." The platform is also very flexible in terms of user definability. You start with a pretty open concept and you can build it up in a structure that works for your organization. But according to Thomas, that flexibility is one of the challenges to implementing SharePoint. People don't know enough about information architecture so companies are struggling with trying to piece together various information structures in way that makes sense for the company so that users can search for information and find it.

The second biggest area in which companies are needing help says Thomas, is document management. Companies have shared drives that serve as a dumping ground for files and folders in a structure that doesn't necessarily make sense from a corporate perspective. So one of the goals they have for SharePoint is to move these documents into a place where they can be properly classified based on a specific information architecture and that offers more granular access control and document versioning capabilities.

Dashboards are another hot term in the industry, says Thomas. Dashboards consolidate data and provide a quick look into what's important for the user. One of the better dashboards is the SharePoint MySite, which is a personal site that everybody gets with a SharePoint installation. Users can roll up documents and tasks from any SharePoint installation in their environment and in a glance see all the documents and tasks that apply to them.

Last, but not least, companies are discovering the importance of SharePoint governance. "SharePoint is such a large, blank slate type of platform, that we have increasingly worked with our clients to convince them that the best way to manage it is to have a plan before they start," says Thomas. "Figure out who's going to do what, outline the architecture, and determine a [backup](#) strategy. It takes a bit longer to do that but the end results reward the effort. Because if you make everyone a self-service admin, your whole deployment can become a chaotic mess. And that can slow adoption rates."