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## Buried Treasure: Uncovering SharePoint's Riches

*Clients will see the light once you show how SharePoint can help them implement collaborative Web applications.*

May 01, 2008

by Ryan Thomas

At least half our engagements began with clients asking exactly what SharePoint can do for their companies. In most such cases, they've already purchased the enterprise version of SharePoint with enough licenses to cover their entire organizations-and yet they typically have little understanding about how to best use the product.

In one case, the client, a 300-employee leadership consulting company, was so frustrated with its initial SharePoint experience that it was close to starting over from scratch with another product or custom-built solution.

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We had been brought in to help clean up that problematic installation. As we did, something interesting happened: The company's executives completely changed their minds about SharePoint.

We were able to demonstrate the Office SharePoint platform's speed, power and versatility simply by building reusable and extendable sites with rich and versatile functionality.

### Solving Problems

Of course, moving from an agitated customer to one willing to write big checks took some hard work. The client had been trying to use SharePoint, but because its executives didn't understand how to harness its capabilities, they spent a lot of

time spinning their wheels. So we started by addressing specific areas of frustration, adapting the offering as necessary. For instance, their existing employee-directory solution was pieced together from existing Web parts and search functionality. However, SharePoint doesn't provide a good employee-directory option right out of the box. Within two days, we built a custom Web part that worked with SharePoint.

We also demonstrated big-picture ways in which SharePoint could help them. For example, the client was essentially looking for a way to construct mostly reusable site definitions to create, customize and easily manage the Web applications they built for their own customers -- and, before we worked with them, they hadn't even known that SharePoint could help them achieve that goal.

The part of this engagement that amazed me the most was just how much SharePoint impressed the client when its team members realized how quickly the product could help them implement Web applications, site collections and usable sites with content. In less than half a day, we used a Virtual PC, ran the quick installation, set up a site with out-of-the-box components and started to make it look like a site that could meet the specific requirements of one of their own customers.

At that point, the company was completely sold on SharePoint. The keys to our success in the case: asking, listening, understanding, documenting and delivering.

#### **Working with a Blank Canvas**

That case, along with many others we've undertaken, illustrates a key point about SharePoint: For many organizations, the product represents a blank sheet of paper. Some recognize the problems they're trying to solve, but don't understand how SharePoint can help them do so. Others haven't even identified the issues that SharePoint could help them address.

So to break down these barriers and gain traction with the client, we always start with a variation on the following question: "What goals and problems do you most want to solve with this type of platform?" The successful engagements are those where we show value by helping our clients use SharePoint to achieve those goals and solve those problems--and, ultimately, gain their trust.

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