Alto

Critical Mission

FEATURED ARTICLE

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SharePoint in the Cloud
Office 365 Makes it Real

The exciting release of Office 365 last week has generated many questions from our customers regarding how SharePoint Online "in the cloud" could fit into their IT strategy. This newsletter makes the case for taking a look and evaluating where SharePoint Online is a quick and inexpensive solution.

Why Now? Is this New?

SharePoint has been available in an online edition for several years, ever since Business Productivity Online Suite (BPOS) was released. What's exciting about last week's announcement of Office 365:

- The online version of SharePoint now matches the much more powerful and easier to use, administer and maintain **SharePoint 2010**. You no longer take a step backward to implement SharePoint Online.

- SharePoint Online now supports "**sandboxed" solutions** where you can add custom code components to your sites. You no longer have to limit your designs to the out-of-the-box features.

- Word and Excel are now available as online, run-in-the-browser applications. This means SharePoint Online is fully supported as a business productivity tool even when running solely in a browser.

Key Advantages

A SharePoint Online portal can be implemented **QUICKLY**. Anyone with moderate computer skills can create an online account and configure a new SharePoint portal site in well under an hour. If you already have an online account, creating a new portal involves just a few clicks of the mouse.

A SharePoint Online portal is **INEXPENSIVE**. SharePoint Online is licensed on a per-user, per-month basis with an initial 5 user minimum, at $5 per user per month.

These two factors together mean solving a business challenge with SharePoint Online is a low-cost, low-impact, low-risk endeavor. You could conceivably get a return on investment **the same day** you create the portal.

Ideal Scenarios

SharePoint Online offers an inexpensive and easy solution to a wide variety of challenges. Here are a few examples from Alto customers.

- Business partner process integration: complex projects involving multiple people from multiple organizations – how do you coordinate all that activity? E-mail and phone calls? A SharePoint Online portal is accessible to everyone, everywhere, any time and vastly more efficient than the alternatives.

- Working from home or while on the road: gas prices and commute times make allowing staff to work from home an attractive proposition. A SharePoint Online portal makes it easy for staff in the office and staff at home (or on the road) to collaborate, even in real-time, with the same Office documents, while also tracking to-do tasks, calendars and other lists the help coordinate the process.

- Workflow automation: If you have complex, multi-step business procedures that involve people both inside and outside of your organization, a SharePoint Online portal can leverage a powerful workflow engine to automate and streamline decision-making, status reporting and management.

Can I Trust It?

It's easy to get a business user excited about a cheap and easy solution. It's more challenging for an IT manager to put their trust in a service running outside their control. Common concerns include reliability and ease of administration and maintenance.

Trusting a Microsoft data center is relative to the level of trust you're presently placing in your own on-premise systems. Microsoft has gone to great lengths to ensure that the hardware, networks software and even the staff in their data centers are as up to date and secure as possible. This is a huge investment that can be **leveraged over millions of users**, and can turn the entire trust issue on its head: for the scenarios mentioned previously, would your in-house solution be as secure? Not if you're trying to keep the solution as inexpensive as possible.

Summary

It's time to take a fresh look at the latest version of SharePoint Online. It offers compelling solutions to a variety of IT challenges not previously available at such low cost and ease of implementation.

If you're curious about Office 365 specifically or SharePoint in general and want to learn more, Alto offers a training class designed to get you up to speed, fast on the concepts and address all your questions and concerns. http://www.altotraining.com

Contact Alto if you'd like a demonstration of any of the products or techniques discussed in this article. Our next webinar is devoted to these concepts.