SharePoint Information Governance That Works

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Martin Garland has more than 20 years' experience in search, classification and enterprise content management within the broader information management industry. He has focused on sales, marketing and general management, and has expertise in both startup and turnaround operations throughout Europe, the US and Asia Pacific. One of the founders of Concept Searching, he is responsible for both marketing strategy and North American and international operations.

Every organization is unique in its requirements and approach to information governance. These variations increase as SharePoint becomes prolific in organizations of all sizes. Despite the rapid adoption of SharePoint, it has traditionally been used to solve collaboration, content and records management challenges at the departmental level, outside the view and control of a corporate IT function. While this gives departments control of their content, it makes information governance more difficult for the IT staff, having no control of or insight into the content. From an enterprise perspective, this increases organizational risk, non-compliance issues and the risk of data privacy exposures, and impacts decision-making.

The enterprise IT challenge is to continue to provide business benefits to end users while maintaining a level of consistency and control. A governance plan is necessary, but if it is unrealistic or impractical to implement it will fail. It is essential to ensure that it delivers relevant content to its users in an effective way, while protecting the enterprise from legal, regulatory and non-compliance issues. Concept Searching's approach has resulted in the development of the Smart Content Framework, which complements our SharePoint technology suite and addresses information governance and the tactical building blocks to implement in order to realistically achieve objectives. This framework was developed to solve the challenges of information governance in SharePoint for organizations including the US Army Medical Command, OppenheimerFunds, Perkins+Will, and the NASA Safety Center.

The crux of the problem with information governance is the inability to rely on end users to accurately and consistently add metadata to content and process information according to policies. Poorly designed and managed repositories of content result in multiple versions of the same document and can cause decision makers to find and rely on inaccurate data. Unmanaged Web servers running SharePoint can deliver unanticipated results, such as security exposures, inconsistent regulatory compliance issues and non-declaration of records.

At a fundamental level, enterprises struggle with managing content assets which stems from end users' inability to accurately and consistently tag content for search, reuse, records identification and archival purposes. An enterprise metadata repository is the primary building block in any information governance plan, which enables the proactive management of content.

A sound information governance strategy includes enterprise search. Most end users are unable to find relevant information to support business objectives, resulting in the inability to find, reuse and repurpose information. The second building block in our framework is insight. Regardless of the enterprise search solution, the delivery of meaningful results depends on the ability to effectively index and classify content and to develop taxonomies to better manage the content. The search engine itself provides the features, functions and interface while the classification structure delivers relevant results.

A key component in any information governance is governance itself. The overarching enterprise governance structure allows staff to work in the most efficient and effective way possible by giving them access to information assets in a controlled and secure manner. A key component is ease of use and transparency. This building block consists of tools that ensure information quality, maintain the lifecycle of information, address the retention and disposition of records, secure and protect privacy, and establish standards when dealing with information assets, including unstructured content.

A comprehensive approach for managing information is necessary to ensure compliance with policies. This approach ensures consistency, is implemented transparently, improves recordkeeping, and enables the establishment of monitoring and auditing processes to ensure proof of compliance and data protection.

Our fifth building block is policy. This building block includes the ability to identify records, privacy information and intellectual assets, and fully automate the process to handle the appropriate disposition of the content. This includes discovering where the content resides, cleansing the content through organizationally defined concepts and descriptors, identifying the relationships within the content and then defining the policies with automatic enforcement.

Part of an information governance plan includes the proactive identification and protection of unknown privacy exposures before they occur, as well as monitor in real time organizationally defined vocabulary and descriptors in content as it is created or ingested. Clients are able to automatically secure sensitive information, declare documents of record and automate workflow initiation, so comply with federal regulations and reduce organizational risk. Within SharePoint, this includes the ability to automatically apply correct content types when organizationally defined descriptors and vocabulary reside within documents.

Adding Social to the Mix

Social networking tools, which encourage collaboration, can link employees, partners, suppliers and customers in order to share information, are becoming useful tools for business communication. The primary business benefits of these collaborative and social tools are also accompanied by inherent weaknesses. There are several concerns such as security, unauthorized use and communication noise. Enterprise 2.0 must be managed within the information governance plan. This provides structure and protects the organization from data exposures and reduces risk. Adding structure to these tools increases productivity and enables knowledge workers to find correct information and collaborate with peers.

As you plan or augment your information governance plan, evaluate technologies that gain control of unstructured content and run natively in SharePoint. In addition, look for vendors that have a proven track record in successfully solving information governance challenges in SharePoint. A technology solution should leverage features in SharePoint for sharing metadata across multiple site collections and server farms. The organizational role is to develop the rules and processes to adopt and enforce, and utilize the strengths of SharePoint, while maximizing the value and minimizing the risk associated with information from within SharePoint, as well as from diverse repositories. ∎