xillio | **Liberate your content**

The Changing Role of Microsoft Sharepoint

How the market leading web collaboration platform evolved and keeps evolving

A recap and future role

With the buzz around Artificial Intelligence and the introduction of Microsoft Copilot, it's easy to overlook the significant additions, changes and innovations Microsoft is bringing to one of the core components of the MS 365 platform: SharePoint. To appreciate this better, we thought it would not hurt to recap the history of the product and put recent developments in a wider perspective.

No doubt, the product's evolving roadmap will influence your strategy towards the adoption or usage of SharePoint. It is time to take some critical decisions about its future role in your organization, and this article aims to help you with that.

Early days

SharePoint started out as a Web Portal extension to Microsoft Office products in the early 2000s, allowing users to share Office files over the intranet. Organizations were starting to recognize the importance of web-based communication and collaboration. SharePoint Portal Server addressed this need by providing a platform for creating web portal sites that allowed employees to access information, documents, and resources conveniently.

At first, it did not sell too well, until in 2003 a free version was distributed, leading to thousands of corporate workspaces being created in many industries. This spurred the interest for the platform and created a viable user demand for new and improved features.

The journey towards enterprise collaboration

With the release of Microsoft Office SharePoint Server (MOSS) 2007, the product began its transformation from a web portal product with limited capabilities, to a more robust enterprise-level solution for online communication and collaboration. In March 2008, Bill Gates reported 100 million user licenses sold to over 17k companies, grossing US$ 1 billion in sales. Even if these reported licences were by far not always actively used, it was a massive sales lever for SQL Server too, as by the time not just metadata but all content was stored in the database.

Still, the product did not compare yet to certain competition in the collaborative space, notably that of rival IBM. Events like the global adoption of SharePoint by companies like Shell triggered the inclusion of

...

enterprise features like the ability to manage global site collections centrally.

Also, the first social media functions including wiki support where introduced. Former IBM CTO Ray Ozzie, the inventor of Lotus Notes that joined Microsoft in 2005 as a chief architect, believed in a major role for browser-based applications and stimulated its usage as the main tool for enterprise information workers. With the arrival of SharePoint 2010, also the pre-tenant concept of farms was introduced, that paved the way for further expansion in the enterprise realm.

The move to the cloud

Microsoft launched SharePoint Online (SPO) in 2013, after creating its Azure cloud platform in 2010. A huge program was started, stimulating customers to move their workload to the cloud. At first, this was met with a lot of reservation from notably enterprise customers, who feared their data was not safe once it moved beyond their immediate control. Microsoft literally had to spend billions to ensure maximum data security and the certificates to prove it. Gradually, initial reservations gave way to the economics of scale, and the cloud business case simply became too compelling to ignore. Having your own datacenter was rapidly becoming a luxury.

With the move of SharePoint to the cloud, a few essential characteristics of the product changed:

• It was no longer possible to execute so-called server-side code. As Microsoft had to guarantee the stability of its cloud platform, it was understandable that it could risk the execution of code it did not have control over. This proved to be a massive hurdle for moving over to SPO though, as a lot of customers had SharePoint in use as an application platform, with lots of custom code running on their servers.

• Client-side code was still allowed but was made easier with the adoption of modern front-end frameworks like React, which replaced Active server Pages as a way to change the behavior of the front-end. Also, the concept of configurable web-parts was introduced to allow a no-code approach to configuring of the user interface.

• SharePoint was no longer a stand-alone product. It became part of the Microsoft 365 family of products, which were rebuilt on a shared layer of service components, allowing for better integration and interaction between the different apps on the platform. We will discuss this next, as this development had a lot of impact in itself.

• Admins had much less control over the introduction of new features, they would just appear in a next release and be active. This allowed Microsoft to get fast responses to newly introduced features and receive early indicators whether the feature caught on with the user community or not.

Apart from product changes, the Microsoft 365 product teams adopted agile ways of working, and product development was largely moved to India. This allowed for much faster release of new features and a more predictable release schedule – with the Microsoft 365 roadmap as the new beacon for feature releases.

Preparing for the future

These structural changes opened the door for new applications of the now twenty-year old product. More or less, the following list depicts their logical consequences, but they also urged for a fundamental re-thinking of the essential role of SharePoint in the information management landscape, and the exploration of that road we think has only just started.

- For one, with the introduction of **Microsoft Teams**, the role of SharePoint inevitably had to change. Teams, as an application, is a collaboration platform pur sang, which means that the collaborative aspects of SharePoint are naturally competing with it. Hence, we now see SharePoint as the file sharing component behind the Files tab in Teams, which is implemented as a Document Library in a group-enabled team style site.

- SharePoint has always supported two distinct ways of working with information in a hybrid configuration: collaborative and transactional. At the same time, the transactional features were never at par with the enterprise content management systems that specialized in this way of working. Enter **Sharepoint Premium**!

Starting out as SharePoint Syntex from its introduction in October 2020, Sharepoint Premium bundles enterprise document processing features with SharePoint Online as a basis. Currently, it allows for AI supported document classification and metadata extraction, template-based document creation, annotation, and a lot more.
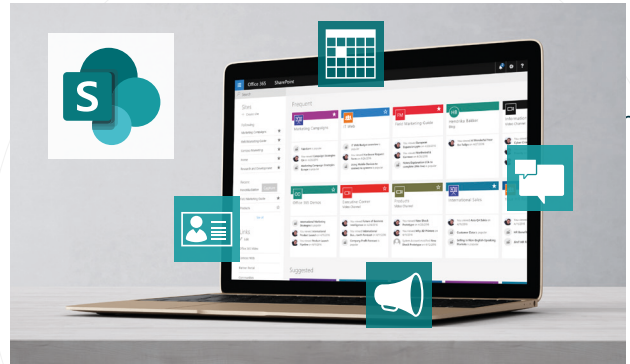
An aggressive roadmap for the product has been published, promising a rapid addition of enterprise features to rival those of the leading ECM vendors. This includes the introduction of a content backup solution and a 'true' archiving solution, allowing you to store less used content for the long term on more cost-effective storage services.

•••

Latest news from
MICROSOFT IGNITE

*Microsoft just announced at their annual Ignite event that Microsoft Syntex and SharePoint Advanced Management will be bundled together with new forthcoming features like Digital Signatures and sold under the name **SharePoint Premium**.*

xillio Liberate your content

•••

- In May of this year, Microsoft announced plans to introduce a separate version of SharePoint Online, which is fully dedicated to being integrated with 3rd party applications. This new product is now branded as SharePoint Embedded. This product variant can be classified as a 'headless ECM', meaning a content management system which is meant to provide its services via an API rather that a Graphical User Interface. This allows for SharePoint to play a role as a content repository in any application that allows for application integration via an API, much like it now plays that role in Teams. We think this development should not be underestimated, as it potentially allows to increase the user base for SharePoint far beyond its current reach.

- With **Viva Connections**, Microsoft provides new features for building engaging corporate intranet portals. You could say that with Connections, SharePoint is back at its original goals of supporting the effective sharing of information by providing

and focus on employee engagement, good old intranet is now being transformed into an Employee Experience Platform.

- You probably heard of **Copilot** by now: the integration of generative, large language model-based AI in almost any of the Microsoft 365 apps, including SharePoint and Syntex. It remains to be seen if this addition will fundamentally change our way of working with information the way it is

About Xillio

These days, your organization needs to be agile to stay relevant. The same goes for your enterprise content. But where to start? After all, the more complex your enterprise content, the more daunting it seems to take the leap to cloud services.

That's where we come in. Our migration experts are ready to help you unlock your organization's full potential – every step of the way. Whether your content migration to Microsoft 365 starts from a legacy system or a more modern platform, our approach is tailored to your specific needs. Seamless, hassle-free, and 100% future-proof. *Let's liberate your content!*

xillio. **Liberate your content**

Should you change your strategy on using SharePoint and content management products?

With all this, what approach should you take towards adopting SharePoint as part of your information management strategy or decide on the future of any content management product you are currently using? There are a few trends we can observe from our global installed base which we would like to share with you.

- The move to cloud is still in full swing. But is has entered a new phase: the effort to decommission the last remaining enterprise applications still hosted on-premises to further reduce operational cost is now high on the agenda of most CIO's. The pace of collaborative workloads moving to cloud has increased, spurred by COVID, but for transactional workloads this proved to be more of a challenge. With the introduction of products like SharePoint Premium (intelligent document processing), Purview (platform-wide compliance management) and Power Automate (robotic, low-code process automation), Microsoft is supplying a wealth of enterprise information management features to tackle virtually any use case on an enterprise scale. The business case for moving legacy solutions to Microsoft 365 is stronger than ever, and services to help you migrate have become industrialized.

- Microsoft Embedded offers a huge opportunity to replace legacy content management systems. By integrating Microsoft repository services into your primary business application, your content becomes part of the Microsoft 365 platform, allowing for automating its processing using SharePoint Premium and Power Automate, centralized compliance management, and even AI supported knowledge management through the Viva Topics product.

- If you adopted Teams as your main solution for online collaboration, and you currently use SharePoint (perhaps the on-prem version still)

in parallel as both a collaboration and intranet platform, it is time to reconsider your options. Looking at current developments, SharePoint as we know it is likely to be deprecated as a stand-alone solution, and may be split into a Teams variant, a Premium variant for transactional content management, a Viva variant to serve employee experiences, and the headless Embedded variant mentioned to serve application integration. We recommend looking at these use cases in your organization, and decide if your current SharePoint usage needs re-strategizing so it is prepared for future use.

- The introduction of Copilot is providing yet another incentive to move content over to Microsoft 365 and SharePoint, as only then you will be able to reap the benefits of the AI capabilities. In combination with Purview, the security and privacy of the information you share with it and process through it is safeguarded throughout, adding to the business case.

> *In this article, we have tried to highlight and explain the latest trends in Microsoft SharePoint product development by looking at its past and any surrounding trends, to help you determine if you should change your strategy on using or adopting the product. We hope we succeeded and opened up new lines of thought for you to consider. In case you would like to talk to us about any aspect, feel free to reach out.*

xillio Liberate your content

xillio

Liberate your content

@ sales@xillio.com

📞 +31 (0)35 622 95 45

🌐 www.xillio.com