Whitepaper

Microsoft SharePoint Embedded:

Integrate your favourite content repository with any modern business application

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Introduction

Perhaps it has been underplayed in the big waves the introduction the Microsoft Copilot product is making, but Microsoft SharePoint Embedded may well be the most significant development in the Microsoft 365 stack, next to that.

The reason for this is that it enables the integration of your valuable business content with all the benefits of Microsoft 365, without you needing to switch business applications. And that is no trivial feat! For this, a version of SharePoint Online has been created that does away with the collaborative site metaphor and the extensive interface that goes with that.

Instead, it offers content repository services entirely manageable via the Microsoft Graph REST API. This allows you to embed these services into any business application that allows for API based integration, or to configure you own user interface with low code tooling of your choice (including the Microsoft Power platform).

How does it work?

SharePoint Embedded shares several features with regular SharePoint Online but is really a separate application and not just a scaled down version of its big sister. After enabling the use of SharePoint Embedded in your tenant, when you create an Embedded based app, a special SharePoint storage partition will be created.

This partition can only be accessed via a REST API which is an extension of the existing Microsoft Graph API. Thus, you may now build your own applications on top of SharePoint using any custom application development framework you prefer or integrate SharePoint with your business applications as long as they support API based application integration!

That said, SharePoint Embedded does work a bit different from how you typically

experience SharePoint Online. This is because the Embedded version only focuses on content storage and retrieval functionality and does away with all the collaborative and intranet site capabilities. You could best see it as a file share on steroids, pairing simplicity of architecture with a number of content management advantages over plain file storage solutions.

SharePoint Embedded storage logic

Whereas SharePoint Online uses Sites as the main object for managing information, SharePoint Embedded works with file storage containers or Containers for short. A container acts at the level of a SharePoint site library or a OneDrive. It supports the folder object for organizing files, and contrary to OneDrive also supports metadata. It also supports ACL-based access controls on the storage hierarchy, and Microsoft Purview based security and compliance capabilities.

As of now, SharePoint Embedded does not support more advanced content management features we are used to from SharePoint Online like file versioning support and document sets. Also, the metadata support is limited to a specific set of column types. As the product is currently in public preview mode, we suggest keeping an eye on the application roadmap for further additions and changes.

Fun fact: Microsoft Loop and Designer now use SharePoint Embedded containers to storage their application content.

Integration with custom or business applications

Integration with a SharePoint Embedded container is based on an extended command set of the Microsoft Graph REST-based API. It allows to perform CRUD (create-read-update-delete) operations on container (microsoft.graph.fileStorageContainer) objects and basic access management.

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There are two main use cases for this capability:

1.   Create custom applications or workflows using SharePoint Embedded as a content repository

2.   Integrate SharePoint Embedded containers with your business application(s)

Let's discuss these options in a bit more detail.

Ad 1. Creating content-enabled custom applications and workflows

If, for whatever reason, the standard user interface of SharePoint does not satisfy your needs for content storage and management, you may consider creating a custom application or workflow that uses SharePoint Embedded to store and manage content. For instance, you have a very distinct publishing process for content and want to have a tailored user experience to support it.

In that case you could create for example a Power App with and Power Automate custom workflow behind it, allowing you to customize the user experience from A to Z. The app would collect a draft piece of content and make sure it gets properly reviewed and approved using a custom workflow running in the backend. You can make the Power Automate flow as sophisticated as you want to and can easily make changes over time as needed. SharePoint Embedded will store the necessary files and metadata and allow for integration with e.g. a digital signature application.

With the built-in support for Microsoft Purview, you can also secure your content based on its metadata or just on its contents that will then be classified for sensitivity or labelled for retention. This prevents content being accessed or leaked to the wrong persons or deleted inadvertently.

Or you need a repository service that serves media files on demand. You may then create an application wrapper that acts as a search-and-retrieve service, using the metadata stored with the files. It may even be capable of re-formatting or rendering the file content for eventual usage, et cetera. Again, SharePoint Embedded will store and organize files and metadata and Purview would protect them.

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Ad 2. Integrating SharePoint Embedded with existing business applications

Perhaps even more powerful, the fact that integration with SharePoint Embedded is REST API based opens the door for integration with any business application that supports API-based integration. There may be several reasons to consider this path, here are some prominent ones:

a. Your business application has poor file management capabilities but allows for other file storage solutions to integrated. Think of e.g. a Customer Relations Management, Human Resources Management, Case Management or Supply Chain Management solution that relies heavily on dossiers and files but offer only very basic file management capabilities.

b. Your business application has sufficient file management capabilities but lacks in information compliance. Migrating your files to a SharePoint Embedded based repository and integrating that with your application, when supported, will allow you to use Microsoft Purview to secure your files and apply information compliance features.

c. Your business application relies on a lot of manual information processing and lacks in document processing automation. If content can be stored in SharePoint Embedded, it becomes easy to integrate with Microsoft Azure based AI and document processing capabilities. E.g. a document captured via the business application may be classified and tagged with metadata in the background using intelligent processing capabilities, allowing for faster processing in the business application itself.

With these options, it is easy to see how Microsoft Embedded can help to make your content part of the Microsoft cloud platform and all its capabilities, without your users having to part from your preferred business applications.

Licensing and Cost

So what is the cost associated with using Microsoft SharePoint Embedded? As always, consult official Microsoft sources for any pricing update or licensing change (see reference). The current model in the public preview stage is based on a pay-as-you-go licensing model, based on storage volume consumed and number of API transactions.

As a calculation example, storing 1 Tb worth of files for a full calendar year, with a 100 transactions per day will cost around USD 2,500. Enforcing a lower latency connection to your SharePoint Embedded containers comes at small uptake per Gb transferred.

Want to know more or see a live demo? Contact us.

References:
- Overview of SharePoint Embedded
- Enable SharePoint Embedded
- SharePoint Embedded Terms of Service

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!

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