

MICROSOFT U.S. BUSINESS & MARKETING ORGANIZATION

Marketing team aggregates and syndicates digital content on SharePoint 2010 for greater impact, efficiency, and control



ESSENTIALS

Challenge

- Make it easier for marketers to reach targeted audiences through multiple channels, including partner and third-party sites, with the right digital content—at the right time

Solution

- Implement a core digital content aggregation and syndication system on SharePoint 2010 to provide a common set of services that marketers can use to organize content from multiple sources and syndicate, or publish, to multiple sites

Key benefits

- Consolidated platform for managing all digital marketing content increases online exposure and re-use
- Powerful taxonomy and search capabilities make it easier for customers and prospects to find relevant information
- Flexible architecture uses ADFS to provide multiple levels of authorization and authentication to different content
- Cost savings gained by on-boarding 15 sites to the new content syndication platform is estimated at about \$4 Million

The Microsoft U.S. Business Marketing Organization (USBMO) is responsible for marketing Microsoft business solutions in the United States. The group's Digital Marketing team focuses on making the most effective use of digital content and tools to reach targeted audiences.

THE RIGHT CONTENT—THE RIGHT EXPERIENCE

“Today Microsoft relies heavily on our own website to deliver content to our business customers,” says Peter Davio, senior technical program manager of the USBMO Digital Marketing Team. “But with the growth of social media and expansion of ways to engage online, our marketers need more sophisticated tools to get the right content to the right person to create the right experience.”

Corporate websites limit marketers in two ways. First, prospects have to choose to visit the site. Second, they have to be able to find relevant information quickly and easily. With estimates of more than 10 million pages of content already on the Microsoft.com site—and more added daily—the Digital Marketing team set out to develop a better way to enable marketers, partners, and customers to contribute, find, share, and use digital content.

“It was clearly impractical to try to develop a single content management environment with all the content,” says Jeff Litvak, a senior marketing manager in Microsoft's Global Marketing Organization (GMO). “What we needed was a central repository of metadata that would enable us to look across Microsoft.com and point to where content is located.”

Unlike traditional content management systems that store and manage content directly, the USBMO set out to build an aggregation and syndication solution that uses information about content to manage it. Tagging content with information about the intended audience, for example, could be used to guide users to relevant information—or to syndicate content out on other online sites, such as product portals, partner websites, third-party blogs, and social media destinations, where it could gain exposure and drive traffic back to Microsoft sites.

AGGREGATION AND SYNDICATION

Microsoft often turns to consultancy partners to help develop and implement internal business systems built on Microsoft technologies. As a first step in a long-term digital marketing content strategy, the USBMO engaged EMC[®] Consulting to help it build a core content aggregation and syndication platform on the Microsoft[®] SharePoint[®] Server 2010 platform.

“We first considered EMC because of their recognized leadership in enterprise content management—and we also knew EMC had a good relationship with the Microsoft IT organization, which would be a critical factor in configuring the right environment in the data center,” says Davio.

“EMC also had a large number of case studies and working examples demonstrating their ability to develop innovative solutions on the SharePoint platform,” he adds. “In fact, EMC Consulting had the deepest, most practical experience in SharePoint 2010, which at that point in time was still in beta and had not been released to manufacturing yet.”

“EMC configured and installed the infrastructure and developed and delivered the solution in an aggressive timeframe. Inception to initial release took less than five months, all the more remarkable because we were working with a pre-release version of SharePoint 2010.”

PETER DAVIO
SENIOR TECHNICAL PROGRAM MANAGER, USBMO

“Besides certified SharePoint 2010 technical consultants and solution experience, EMC made a good strategic partner,” says Litvak. “This was a long-term program for us, not a one-off tactical project. EMC had managed a lot of very large projects and had the program and process management discipline we wanted.”

STANDARDIZING ON SHAREPOINT 2010

The team’s immediate objective was to architect a core platform solution on SharePoint 2010 that would provide a common set of services and enable all USBMO digital marketing content to eventually be aggregated and syndicated by a single system.

By utilizing the built-in functionality of SharePoint and capabilities such as Active Directory Federated Services (ADFS) for services such as authorization, authentication, taxonomy, search, and reporting, the USBMO could save time, money, and effort. A common platform would also make it easier to control quality and increase the re-use of content across product and solution groups. For example, standardizing on a consistent set of tags in the SharePoint term store for content markup, would apply proper Microsoft product naming conventions across all content.

EMC Consulting assembled a team with program management, SharePoint solution architecture, and application development expertise. They worked with the USBMO to define functional requirements for content management, digital asset management, metadata management, and rights and delivery management. They helped determine how to best meet the USBMO’s immediate content syndication platform schedule and budget goals, while also designing a platform that was extensible and scalable to meet future objectives. They also worked with the USBMO to define and capture metrics to measure content effectiveness and improve aggregation and syndication processes over time.

In addition to the solution design, EMC Consulting helped the USBMO develop a Center of Excellence. The team developed and documented processes for on-boarding new sites, managing content lifecycle, and adding functionality over time. They set governance standards and defined what in-house resources and skills were needed to ensure that the USBMO could fully capitalize on their platform investment.

“As SharePoint 2010 continues to grow, it offers many advantages as a platform for content aggregation and syndication. EMC Consulting had the expertise in both content management and SharePoint solution development to understand our vision. They also had the program management experience to help us implement a large, strategic program with many moving parts.”

PETER DAVIO
SENIOR TECHNICAL PROGRAM MANAGER, USMBO

“The EMC consultants helped us think it all through very thoroughly,” says Litvak. “The technical solution was also presented in a very straightforward, easy-to-follow way that made it clear that EMC understood the nature of SharePoint.”

Among other features, the content aggregation and syndication system was the first SharePoint 2010 site to on-board to the Microsoft corporate ADFS 2.0 service. The site was also the first to enable Windows Live ID single sign-on (SSO) on the SharePoint 2010 platform. The combination of ADFS authentication and Windows Live ID SSO makes it easier to enable users to collaborate across organizational boundaries and easily access applications on-premise and in the cloud, while maintaining application security. ADFS with Windows Live ID SSO also enables the site administrator to leverage a single login methodology for access across user groups (Corporate, Partners, Customer, and Public). Research conducted by EMC was captured in published material to enable third parties to invoke the SharePoint object model by authenticating via ADFS. Custom integration work done by EMC on the project, which links Windows Live ID accounts with partner information, is a feature that Microsoft is planning to roll out in a project it’s working on with the U.S. Partner Ready-to-Go team.

ONSHORE AND OFFSHORE AGILE DEVELOPMENT TEAM

To meet the USBMO’s strict deliverable, timeframe and budget objectives, EMC Consulting used a team that comprised onsite, onshore, and offshore resources and applied agile software development methodologies.

“EMC’s ability to combine onshore and offshore resources in one team helped us to hit our aggressive deadlines and complete the project with the funding we had in place,” says Davio. “The agile development methodology helped us prioritize, break tasks into specific sprints, and then measure performance to see how the project was tracking against completion. EMC was able to accommodate critical adjustments on-the-fly and deliver on time and on budget.”

DIGITAL ASSET MANAGEMENT

Before development of the new aggregation and syndication system was even underway, the USBMO faced a deadline-driven need to implement a new digital asset management solution on top of the yet-to-be-built platform.

The objective was to be able to move corporate brand assets off of an aging third-party digital asset management system to avoid the cost of renewing the software license and third-party support contracts. The new system had to be in place in four months.

“Even though it meant ‘building the house’ and ‘moving in the furniture’ at the same time, it made sense to do the two projects in parallel and bring up the brand asset site as the first tenant on the SharePoint platform,” says Litvak.

BUILDING A MEDIA BANK FOR THE CORPORATE BRAND

More than 100,000 digital Microsoft corporate brand assets—logos, photos, box covers, and other artwork—resided on what the Microsoft Brand team called “Media Bank,” an instance of Interwoven MediaBin. Although the Microsoft Corporate Marketing Group’s Brand Team was responsible for maintaining the corporate brand and assets, the system had historically leveraged GMO infrastructure.

The EMC team worked to rebuild the digital asset management features of Media Bank system on the SharePoint 2010 platform. In addition to housing assets, the system was designed to take advantage of the SharePoint aggregation and syndication platform functions, and to make it easy for the corporate brand team to upload new assets and remove old ones.

“It’s not unusual for the brand team to add several hundred images in a day,” says Litvak. “They also needed to be able to remove content as products are discontinued or the legal rights to use certain images expire.”

EMC Consulting’s lead architect led the effort to develop an automated tool for pulling metadata and content over to the SharePoint platform and used ADFS to set up levels of authorization and authentication. A developer in EMC’s Center of Excellence (CoE) in Bangalore used a third-party set of tools to trans-code and render high-resolution thumbnails and previews of the images in SharePoint.

At the time of the migration, the number of assets that needed to be transferred to the new digital asset management system had grown to more than 130,000. The process of physically transferring the assets took nearly a month, but the team met its deadline.

“All of the assets were perfectly migrated and rendered,” says Litvak. “The legacy digital asset management system was decommissioned and third-party contracts were allowed to expire. We were able to eliminate tens of thousands of dollars in annual software update, maintenance, and support costs. With the reduction in infrastructure costs, the first year savings added up to more than \$50,000.”

ON-BOARDING SITES

The first website to be on-boarded onto the aggregation and syndication platform as a tenant was Microsoft’s public-facing site, events.microsoft.com.

In addition to schedules of upcoming in-person and online events, the site provides access to about 10,000 videos, webcasts, and podcasts that have been produced to help different customer and user segments learn more about how to use, manage, or support Microsoft solutions.

“A lot of excellent event content had been produced, but it was only being used once or twice and not being shared broadly within our ecosystem of marketers for re-use in their own marketing campaigns,” says Davio. “On the user side, visitors could spend many minutes browsing, but only really scratch the surface of what was available to them.”

EVENTS SITE RE-DESIGN

Besides taking advantage of the new SharePoint platform functions, the USBMO wanted to improve the site’s user interface. Re-design of the user interface was contracted to an outside agency, with EMC Consulting managing the overall project.

“EMC helped us with both the back-end configuration and infrastructure installation, as well as the front-end of user experience, working with the custom UI design from the agency and optimizing performance,” says Davio. “It was quite a challenge to organize all that content and to push SharePoint to render all the different formats properly. EMC really put in the time and effort to go through several rounds of tweaking to make sure that the final product delivered the right performance and supported the new user interface.”

Out-of-the-box SharePoint page layout and publishing tools were used to publish the site and support the custom-designed interface. Now visitors to the site can see all relevant content and quickly drill down to what they want, whether it's product information or technical training based on their roles. Marketers gain a single, consolidated view of all event content. They can see when a piece was produced and how many times it has been used.

"It's the best of both worlds," says Davio. "We didn't have to reinvent the wheel on publishing and workflow to have a custom user interface on top. The look-and-feel is a dramatic improvement—and isn't anything like what many would consider a standard SharePoint site either—demonstrating that SharePoint 2010 is a great platform for Internet sites as well as intranet sites."

A PLATFORM AND PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE

"Now we have a single content aggregation and syndication platform that extends from back-end organization to front-end publication that we can use to manage all of our digital marketing content," says Davio.

The goal is to have all useful digital marketing content onboard the platform in the next six months so that it can be searched, re-used, and measured consistently.

"The aggregation and syndication platform is helping us to get marketing content out to the market in a faster and more targeted fashion. We're able to measure how content is used and build more consistent, advanced sites," says Davio. "Now that we're bringing up multiple sites on the platform, we're also starting to see the cost savings."

EMC worked with Microsoft to model the potential cost savings gained by on-boarding additional internal department websites to the content syndication platform. A number of key business drivers were analyzed, including, but not limited to: site operating costs, site upgrade costs, reduction of time spent finding accurate content as well as similar or relevant content, reduction of the amount of content that needed to be re-created or existing content that would otherwise require re-licensing, brand enhancement, and time to market. Based on these factors, an estimated savings of \$4 Million over three years is projected as the platform scales to 15 additional sites.

With the first release of the core platform complete, the USBMO continues to rely on EMC Consulting to support and maintain the platform, assist new stakeholders in on-boarding their sites to the system, and oversee ongoing development projects.

"EMC provides documentation and technical support and oversees new development projects, even in cases where EMC is not doing the actual development work," says Litvak. "The SharePoint aggregation and syndication platform is really turning into a kind of Swiss Army knife for us. We keep finding new and different ways to exploit the capabilities."

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