

## So you want to install Microsoft Windows Sharepoint Services 3.0 on SBS 2003?

**Let me count the ways.**

*By Robert Crane*

The usual first question posed by resellers is – “isn’t Sharepoint already included in Small Business Server 2003?”, to which the answer is “Yes, Virginia it is but..”. For those who don’t know, Sharepoint Version 2.0 comes with all flavours of Small Business Server 2003 and is normally installed by default. “If Sharepoint is already installed on SBS 2003 why should I want to install Sharepoint Services Version 3.0?” As we know with new and updated software there usually comes new features and enhancements and this could not be truer than in the case of Sharepoint 3.0.

So what are some of these new features you may ask? Firstly, some of the underlying software that comes with Sharepoint 3.0 overcomes many of the “throttling” issues faced by Sharepoint Version 2.0. If you accept the standard Sharepoint 3.0 installation, the content databases will now be stored in something known as WMSDE (also known as Microsoft SQL Server 2000 Desktop Engine (Windows)). Some of the issues this overcomes are the 2GB database limit, the slowdown in performance beyond 5 concurrent users, the inability to do full text searches. You don’t have to install Sharepoint 3.0 using the default options and you can choose to store your content databases in other locations (like full SQL databases) but there are still a few interactions between these products that may trip you up going forward.

Apart from changes in the underlying product architecture Sharepoint 3.0 has a number of additional features that make it a really worthwhile product. Firstly, you can use it to create blogs, which function much like an online diary. Next you have something known as Wikis. These are merely documents you can edit online using just a browser. You get the ability to create project tasks and view the information as Gantt charts and you can take all this information offline directly with standard Office products like Outlook 2007 or view it remotely using RSS feeds. What is the benefit of this you may ask? Stop and think of all that information in your business and perhaps your customers business that currently has no central storage location. All those things written down on bits of paper, post-it notes, in employee’s heads, buried in filing cabinets somewhere, buried on a file server somewhere. Imagine if you could not only centrally store and manage all that information but you could also search it all! Ah ha, now can you start to see the benefits?

Customers have IT systems for two simple reasons I believe. Firstly, they want to store information and secondly they want to retrieve it. The faster that they can do either or both the happier they will be. Sharepoint is nothing but a tool to allow customers to do just that. Unfortunately, many customers and resellers don’t appreciate that and I must admit that sometime Sharepoint can be a hard sell but when the concept does “click” in their minds you’ll find they can’t live without it. The best part about Sharepoint Services 3.0 is that it is FREE, yes FREE! No longer will you have to try and justify to your client why they need to spend money before they can even get their hands on the product. This

takes away the first initial barrier customers have to any new technology. When the customer asks “Yeah, sure but how much does this Sharepoint software cost?” take great pleasure in saying, “It is free”. To which your customer might say “And this is Microsoft software right?” to which you can honestly say “Sure is, so perhaps they aren’t the big bad boogie monster people make them out to be eh?”. And so on.

Now just because the product is free doesn’t mean you can simply download it and slap it on SBS 2003. If you do then all I can say is – you’ll be sorry. Why? Because a great deal of the parts that make SBS such a fabulous product, like the consoles and wizards, are built on technology shared with the pre-existing Sharepoint V2.0. Any installation of Sharepoint V3.0 on SBS needs to be done in “side-by-side” mode to retain the existing Sharepoint V2.0. Much like when you open Excel for the first time you are presented with a blank page of rows and columns, Sharepoint requires you to build in the business intelligence required. As with all IT systems the old adage remains – garbage in, garbage out. If you don’t take a step back and consider what you want to achieve from the system before you build it then you are going to be creating more hurdles for yourself and your customer in the future. Now, let’s take a deep breath, a valium, a cup of tea and have a little think about this.

Your first consideration is to whether the customer has actually been using Sharepoint V2.0 (i.e. companyweb) already. If they have then you are going to need to determine whether the data already there will need to be migrated. Perhaps, you’ll be lucky and not much has been done with companyweb and they are happy to start again from scratch but you need to ask the question. Next, you are going to need to consider what level the client is going to take any migration to Sharepoint V3.0. Are they going to use the full document management facilities and versioning? Are they going to want to extend it beyond their LAN to external parties such as suppliers? Are they going to want to grow the system potentially into Microsoft Office Sharepoint Server 2007 (MOSS)? Better to ask these questions up front and build the base in such a way that it can accommodate the planned growth path.

As I mentioned earlier Sharepoint V3.0 installed in the default configuration no longer has a database size limitation but it does install these databases on your Windows system drive (typically C: by default). This means that as the Sharepoint content databases grow so does the space consumed on your system drive. If the client is planning to implement an extensive document management solution in Sharepoint including the retention of previous document versions you could end up filling the disk very, very quickly. If you take the SQL route, you can still keep costs down by installing SQL 2005 Express (again a free download) however this free version does have a limitation on the maximum database size (4GB). So, with SQL Express 2005, you can locate your Sharepoint content databases where you like but they will be restricted to 4GB in size. Conversely if you had left them in WMSDE they can grow to whatever size is required but may potentially fill the system hard disk. See what I mean when I say you need to sit down and have a careful look at exactly the direction the installation with Sharepoint is going to take?

Another fly in the ointment here is the pending release of Microsoft Search Server Express 2008. Already in RC, this product provides improved searching and full text indexing of Sharepoint content but also has the ability to search network file shares! Wow, think of all those clients with file shares that

contains reams and reams of meaningless but critical files. With Search Server you can now index all that information without really having to do any tidy up. Can you see any customer not loving that? Can you install Search Server 2008 Express onto SBS 2003? Yes Virginia but... Search Server Express 2008 needs to have at least SQL Express 2005 installed (if it isn't there it will install it). Although there still aren't a lot of specifics on the product in terms of hardware requirements it probably needs at least 1GB of RAM to run, which is fine but when installed onto an already loaded up SBS box things may start to get slow. So maybe it's time to start talking to clients with a single server about the benefits of a second server that can initially run Sharepoint V3.0 and Search Server Express 2008. That way you'll also get the benefits of Sharepoint V3.0 inbound and outbound mail services.

Even though Sharepoint V3.0 is a great (and free) addition to any SBS 2003 server a little investment in planning up front could not only prevent a whole lot of hassle down the line but it could also result in a client that is happier with the results and more willing to engage you for further implementation. Done right Sharepoint can be quickly and easily installed and configured on most current Windows servers. Done in haste, without considering the client's requirements, questions may be asked whether you really understand the systems that you are recommending.