Six secrets of selling SharePoint

Why is it so difficult?

Probably the first reason is, how do you exactly go about describing what SharePoint is and what it does to someone who struggles with technology anyway? Here's what Microsoft says about SharePoint:

"Your organization can use Office SharePoint Server 2007 to facilitate collaboration, provide content management features, implement business processes, and supply access to information that is essential to organizational goals and processes."

But what exactly is collaboration and how can it help my business? Are probably the next questions the business owner is going to ask.

So here are six simple secrets to help you sell the benefits of SharePoint to any business.

1. Keep it simple

Don't use words like collaboration to describe SharePoint, the best description is simply to call it a tool. Help the business understand that just like they use Word and Excel to document and calculate information, SharePoint can do the same and more. Help them to understand that like Word and Excel the real power of SharePoint is what they are able to build with it and how they can use it to capture their business information. Above all, help them understand that SharePoint is simply a flexible tool, like other Office software, that can be easily customized to suit their individual needs.

2. Start Small

Tackle one problem at a time and keep the initial scope of implementation small. Help the business appreciate how quickly SharePoint can be adapted to provide a solution. Once they understand the value of SharePoint to their business they are going to want to increase its penetration inside their business. To ensure success with SharePoint make sure that you get runs on the board early which you can then use as a platform to achieve the 'big picture'.

3. Seek a champion

You are going to struggle getting a business to understand SharePoint unless you have someone inside that business that is genuinely interested in what SharePoint can do for them. Their level of understanding or acceptance does not need to be high but you need to find the individual or individuals who are willing to at least give SharePoint a go in their business. Invest your time and energy with such a champion helping them fully understand the benefits of SharePoint. Chances are, if you can convince them, they will convince the rest of the business.

4. Show the possibilities

Seeing is believing. You need to effectively demonstrate firstly how SharePoint can solve a business need and then demonstrate what else it can do. SharePoint's flexibility makes that much easier but you need to be able to reveal to the business how much of what they are doing can be integrated and absorbed into a SharePoint solution. This means that you can't sell SharePoint without using it yourself. Every business is different and SharePoint is flexible enough to handle most situations yet if you are not familiar with it yourself you are going to struggle demonstrating its benefits in specific situations.

5. Solve a problem

Unless you can reduce the amount of work that businesses have to do everyday then any solution you provide simply means more work. If a typical business user has five applications open on their desktop at any one time then what ever solution SharePoint provides must reduce that. It makes little sense going from five to six desktop windows for a user since that essentially means more work. You need to aim for something that reduces those desktop windows from five to four at least. Look at how SharePoint can be implemented to reduce the workload inside a business and increase their productivity. Above all, this means that you are going to have to learn how they operate. You must move beyond merely providing technology to providing business solutions.

6. Implement search

People that work with information spend at least one third of their time looking for information. Improving the efficiency of that process and improving its quality provide major benefits for a business. SharePoint combined with Search Server Express provide an excellent

way to index most business information quickly and efficiently. Helping a business find their information quickly will ensure the success of any SharePoint project.

The master key

Think of it this way, if:

- Word is a tool for entering information.
- Excel is a tool for calculating information.
- Browser is a tool for viewing information.
- Outlook is a tool for sending information.
- Google is a tool for finding information.

then

- SharePoint is **the** tool to do it all.

SharePoint works with all the tools a business probably already has and it greatly enhances their capabilities by bringing them all together in one place. Any successful major SharePoint implementation should always make SharePoint the informational 'master key' to a business. Employees must automatically know that the first place they should go to 'unlock' information is their SharePoint site.

Conclusion

Selling SharePoint is a challenge when you only try to sell the technology. The secret is to look at SharePoint as a tool. Everyone in the business that has implemented SharePoint needs to appreciate that if they are not using SharePoint as part of their job everyday then they are not really part of that business. By helping the customer understand how a tool like SharePoint is going to make their lives easier, save them money and improve their productivity you will increase your value to any business because you have become more than a mere technology provider, you have become someone who understands *their* business. Knowledge of a customer's business elevates you to the hallowed status of trusted business advisor. Do that and your success will be guaranteed.

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Founded in 1995, the Computer Information Agency is a specialized technology consultancy in Sydney, Australia that focuses on assisting businesses and individuals improve their productivity using technology and smart business practices. The Computer Information Agency has high levels of experience in technologies such as Windows Servers, including Small Business Server, and desktop applications such as Outlook, Word, Excel and Onenote.

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