# Using Microsoft SharePoint for a Reference Document Library in a P&I Club

Jill Halford, who is the Library and Information Manager at Charles Taylor, was the Document Management Representative on the Business User Team on the project to implement SharePoint and she explains the processes involved in moving several thousand documents to the new system.

## Introduction

Charles Taylor is the manager of the Standard Steamship P&I Club, which insures ship owners against their third party liabilities. Historically the P&I Club has been a very paper based company, with many hard copy files, several Lotus Notes databases and shared folders on the network. Three years ago the decision was made to move towards a paperless office environment and this was combined with upgrading the business workflow system. Phase One of this project included the development of Microsoft Windows Sharepoint Services (WSS) document libraries to sit underneath a bespoke business workflow system developed by a software house.

Phase Two of the project was to provide document libraries for all the other document collections identified by our initial document audit. Sharepoint portal software was used to link up the document libraries not covered by the business workflow system, holding them in WSS sites accessed through the portal areas. This also gave us the benefit of the portal search engine, which is much more sophisticated than the WSS search engine, and access to other portal features. This paper focuses on the development of one of the Phase Two document libraries, the P&I Reference Library.

## P&I Reference Library

One of the most important of the document libraries was the collection of over six thousand full text general information reference documents, which were previously held in a Lotus Notes database managed by the library staff. Most of these documents are in the format of emails, often with attachments, faxes, PDF, Microsoft Office documents and paper documents e.g. legal opinions, reports, correspondence etc. Due to the nature of our business, this is unpublished information much of it originating within the company. The Lotus Notes database, which held this information, had been developed from paper files, and over the years duplicate and overlapping subjects had been set up, as each time a new issue arose a new folder was created. The resulting database worked well for those who used it frequently, particularly senior management. However it was an unwieldy system for those who only needed to use it occasionally.

I had identified the need to rationalise this database a couple of years previously and had been working with subject specialists to draw up a hierarchical arrangement of subjects. I had looked extensively at print and electronic sources to see if I could find a thesaurus or classification scheme already developed, but I could not find one that met our needs. We are a specialist industry with only around twenty P&I Clubs worldwide.

A number of business requirements were identified for the redevelopment of this document database, which was to be known as the P&I Reference Library.

## Business requirements for the P&I Reference Library

The business requirements for the library were:-

- It should use software common to the rest of the business.

- The future development of the library should be business led and not reliant on IT to make every change.

- A structured way to find documents was requested by the senior management, as they did not want to rely on "Search".

- It should be easy to file items.

- All the reference documents should be filed in the same library, they should not be split between libraries.

With the move towards Sharepoint document libraries in other parts of the business, Sharepoint was the first choice of software for a document library.

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Sharepoint, when used out of the box, is very user friendly for developing libraries and lists to hold documents and information. The business requirement of a structured way to find documents and the easy filing of documents were more difficult to meet, being mutually exclusive.

With my involvement in Phase One of the project I had become very familiar with the way in which Sharepoint Libraries worked and we initially considered dividing the Lotus Notes database into a number of libraries as WSS libraries work best with small subject ranges. However one of the business requirements was that all the documents should be stored in one library to preserve the relationship between them, so we investigated how the functionality of Sharepoint could be used to store documents on a wide variety of subjects in a structured way.

Sharepoint does provide features such as views, grouping and filtering, which enable some structure in the document libraries. The challenge was to apply these to the effectively flat structure of the original Lotus Notes database, which had a large number of subject folders.

## Faceted Classification

Taking into account the standard Sharepoint features, the business requirements, and considering the hierarchical taxonomy I had drawn up, we decided to organise the documents using a faceted classification derived from the hierarchical taxonomy. This seemed to be the best way to take advantage of the Sharepoint features and make the library behave in the way we wanted.

## Developing facets

In a WSS library there is the opportunity to have as many columns (fields) of metadata as are required, and I set up around thirty subject columns with dropdown picklists, which provided the faceting structure. As Sharepoint is not a relational database, in order to be able to re-sort and combine the facets into views, only one term could be chosen from each picklist, so the facets and metadata had to be carefully chosen. It was not necessary to pick items from every picklist to index a document, only those that were relevant to the subject.

In addition fields were also created for:

- Document title
- Document date
- Document author
- Corporate author
- Addressee
- Corporate addressee
- Document type

These fields of metadata are common to all the WSS libraries used by the business, making it easy to search across the whole portal.

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## Views

It is possible to produce views, by including some facets, but not others. A further two hierarchical levels can also be produced by further grouping the included facets.

## Finding documents

The Sharepoint WSS libraries include a number of features which help you structure your search for a document, by using the metadata applied to each document.

- Sorting: metadata columns can be sorted into order e.g. author etc.
- Filtering: libraries can be filtered, by picking out a piece of metadata from a column. You can also filter on a filter by as many columns of metadata that you have included in the view effectively narrowing a search.
- Searching within the library: WSS libraries have a simple search engine, which searches the current view. It does not use Boolean logic, but this can be overcome to some extent by the way it can work with filtering and sorting.

## Issues

- **Interface between Sharepoint and Lotus Notes.** The major problem we had (which will not apply to everyone) was the interface between Sharepoint and Lotus Notes. An interface had to be developed in-house in order to file emails into Sharepoint from Lotus Notes.
- **Default Metadata fields.** Sharepoint has been developed with the IT user in mind. e.g. the default name field which gives access to the document and the edit menu actually holds the file name, which in the cases of emails and faxes can be meaningless to the business user. A document title field had to be added along with the document date field and document author field, as the date and author defaults in Sharepoint refer to who uploaded the document and the date they did so.
- **Portal search.** We had to purchase an add-on for the portal. This customised the search to return our document title, document author, and document date
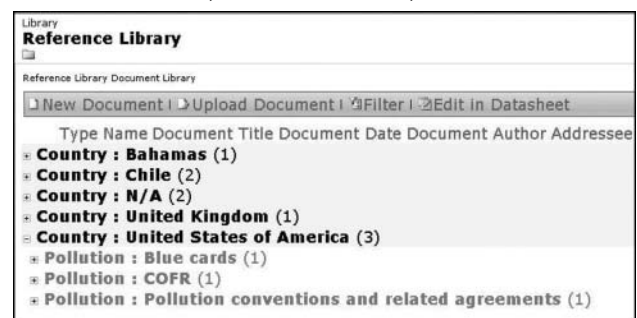


*Figure 1: An example of using views and groups to produce a hierarchical structure*

information as well as the link to the document. Out of the box, the search returns only the default metadata of file name, date of upload etc.

- **Library size.** Currently the Reference Library is around six thousand documents, growing at the rate of two thousand documents a year. Sharepoint does not recommend holding more that one thousand documents in the root of a library, so we have used Sharepoint folders based on time scales e.g. "Jan – April 2006". These folders are purely for administrative purposes, and from the user point of view they do not exist.

- **Size of groupings in views.** If view groupings contain too many documents, it is not possible to view the whole hierarchy of groupings on one screen. It may not be apparent to the user that they will have to page on a number of times to receive the whole list of top-level groupings especially if the number of metadata columns exceeds the page width.

- **Order of Views.** Out of the box views appear down the left hand side of the screen in the order in which they were created. Initially I have created them in alphabetical order. However if we want to add a view, it will appear out of order at the bottom of the list, unless I recreate all the views again, which would be a tedious and time consuming task.

- **Number of metadata columns.** We have had to use so many columns of metadata to categorise the documents, that it has resulted in a very wide screen on the "All documents" view. The search box, page on for more documents and the "Up to Portal" button are on the top right of the screen so we lose them off screen.

- **Confusion between the Portal and Team Sites.** The Portal with the WSS libraries below in team sites, although more robust and secure, is initially confusing. Clicking the "home" button will take you to different places depending on whether you are at the Portal level or the Team Site level.

Initially, most of the executives found it difficult to understand the concept of a faceted classification system. I had to demonstrate how the library would perform using real data. Then, using the expertise of teams of people in the different business areas, business relevant metadata columns and views were perfected. This was a very positive experience, as everyone was very enthusiastic and it has resulted in an increase in staff buy in. I expect the refining of the database will be a continual process.

## Advantages of using Sharepoint

- **Changes in metadata and creation of new document libraries can be made by business**

users. The biggest advantage of using Sharepoint is that we can make most changes ourselves. Each team site has an administrator, who has control over her document libraries, the metadata and the access to the team site. As a result, the document libraries can be very responsive to business change.

- **"Internet" look and feel.** We have had a very positive response from the business to the look and feel of the portal.

- **Easy to use.** It is very easy to use the portal and associated document libraries with minimal training. Because we have used WSS libraries across the P&I Club for all aspects of the business, the executives find the filtering, sorting and searching a familiar way to locate documents.

## Business objectives of the P&I Reference Library revisited:

**Common software.** The P&I Club is now using Sharepoint for all aspects of its electronic document storage. As a result the filing and retrieving of documents is a familiar process no matter which library is being accessed.

**Business led developments.** Sharepoint is eminently suited to being business led, and once set up, IT need only be involved in radical changes and customisation.

**Structured approach to finding documents.** We have managed to provide a structured way to find documents by using filtered "views" and "grouping".

**Documents should be easy to file.** In a way we have sacrificed this in order to meet the previous requirement. The only way we could have made filing documents simpler would have been to abandon the metadata structure and just offer the "search" facility as a way to find documents. However it was a business decision that this did not meet senior management requirements. People who are filing many documents do find this easier than the Lotus Notes database, and we have accepted the fact that people using it less often can either forward the document to the library staff for filing or ask for extra training.

**Filing the documents in one library.** We have managed to overcome the size constraints of Sharepoint libraries by filing the documents in administrative folders.

## Conclusion

Sharepoint has fulfilled many of our requirements, and has been received very positively by the business. There are still some issues that we have not overcome, but we are hoping that some of these will be solved by the next release of Sharepoint.

Jill Halford is a Chartered Member of CILIP, a past Chair of the ICLG and a member of the BIALL Freelancers and OMB Group. She has worked in libraries and information services for over 20 years. She is currently the Library and Information Manager for Charles Taylor Consulting. On the recent company project to develop a new business workflow system she was the Document Management Representative on the Business User Team.