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SharePoint for web sites or not

Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 is marketed across 6 solution segments: collaboration; portals; search; content management; business intelligence and business processes. One question I often get asked by customers is whether or not to use SharePoint for building public web sites. As with most things I.T.-related, the answer is 'it depends'.

Reasons to use SharePoint for building public web sites:

1. You need a web content management system
2. You have a SharePoint strategy
3. You bought the licences

SharePoint is not about designing great visual and interactive web site experiences. For that, consider using the Expression suite or other similar tools. SharePoint is about web content management: separating creating content from site design and management; enabling people to author/edit and publish content using just a web browser; applying workflow and version control to manage publishing of content and manage design changes to templates, pages and elements (such as images) within pages

If you've bought into using SharePoint as a platform for information management internally within your organisation, then it makes sense to consider using it externally as well. Users will already be familiar with how it all works and what the user interface looks like

If you've paid for SharePoint Server 2007, you'd be daft to go and use something else unless you have a specific reason to not use SharePoint. Even if the something else is free, you're just adding in another technology and complicating your environment. Make sure you can justify that extra effort.

There are always two sides to every coin, so what are the reasons to not use SharePoint for building public web sites. If you answered No to the three reasons to use it, the writing is on the wall. There are a couple of additional scenarios I can think of:

1. You want AAA accessibility compliance
2. You want to build a Web 2.0 site

If you are planning to create a Web 2.0-style site, encouraging participation with forums, blogs and wikis, the templates and features that come out of the box with SharePoint will probably be found wanting. They are great for getting started internally and ideal for organisations who have never before used such tools as part of everyday business practices. But the bar is a set a little bit higher for public-facing web sites. People are used to the likes of Wikipedia, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and countless other Web 2.0 applications. You have to aim high if you want to build something similar.

If you are planning to use SharePoint for building public web sites, here are some additional free tools to enhance what it can do:

- [Community Kit for SharePoint](#) - published on Codeplex. Offers enhanced wikis, blogs and templates for community-driven web sites
- [SharePoint Forums Web Part](#) - published on Codeplex. An improved version of the Discussion web part for forums and discussion boards
- [Accessibility Kit for SharePoint](#) - published on Codeplex. Guidance and modifications to achieve accessibility compliance
- [Silverlight Blueprint for SharePoint](#) - Microsoft software+services - integrate rich media capabilities within SharePoint