

Natural Gas Producer Deploys New Intranet Solution, Meets Growth Challenges

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Oil and gas

Customer Profile

Founded in 1989 with just 10 people and a U.S.\$50,000 investment, Chesapeake Energy has become the country's top producer of natural gas. The company is based in Oklahoma City.

Business Situation

To meet the challenges of rapid growth, Chesapeake Energy needed a more powerful intranet solution to boost worker productivity, improve workflow, and enhance collaboration.

Solution

Using Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007, the company deployed a scalable and extensible solution that integrates content from the company's intranet and extranet solutions.

Benefits

- Ease of adoption
- Enhanced collaboration and productivity
- Easier communication with external shareholders
- Smarter decision making
- Improved data analysis

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Wade Brawley, Vice President of Land Administration, Chesapeake Energy

Chesapeake Energy, the leading natural-gas producer in the United States, is a rapidly growing company that tripled its employee headcount between 2005 and 2008. To meet the challenges of such rapid growth, the company needed a more powerful intranet solution to boost worker productivity, improve workflow, and enhance collaboration across the oil and gas value chain. Using Microsoft® Office SharePoint® Server 2007, Chesapeake Energy developed and deployed a new solution that integrates the company's intranet, extranet, and Internet presence. Through its extensibility, the solution streamlines collaboration across project teams, boosts productivity, simplifies data analysis, and creates the basis for consistent communications. With the business capabilities gained through the new solution, Chesapeake Energy is well positioned for future growth.

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Cathy Tompkins, Chief Information Officer,
Chesapeake Energy

Situation

Chesapeake Energy is the largest producer of natural gas in the United States. It is also the most active driller, with a daily production volume of 2.3 billion cubic feet (BCF) equivalent. Between 2005 and 2008, the company experienced very rapid growth, adding up to 100 new employees per month. The organization currently has approximately 7,000 employees.

Keeping up with such growth requires a significant level of IT flexibility, particularly when it comes to frequently used systems such as the corporate intranet. The legacy intranet at Chesapeake Energy was a case in point. Developed in pure HTML and managed by IT staff, it was cumbersome to maintain, update, and extend. This led to delays in keeping content fresh, and it meant that users were less invested than they might have been in the quality and timeliness of that content. Chesapeake Energy wanted to improve its business productivity and optimize its IT infrastructure by standardizing on the Microsoft® environment.

Solution

To address these challenges, Chesapeake IT executives conferred with members of their Microsoft account team, who in turn recommended a visit to the Microsoft Technology Center (MTC) in Austin, Texas.

“We learned that the MTC could quickly familiarize us with a new technology and give us a good jump-start on developing our solution,” says Lori Garcia, Manager, IT Business Systems, Chesapeake Energy. In 2006, the IT team spent a week at the MTC in an Architecture Design session and a Proof of Concept session.

What team members learned about Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007 during that week was enough to convince them that it

could provide a way around the problems of their legacy intranet. Because the company relied extensively on Microsoft technologies, the executives felt that Office SharePoint Server would integrate smoothly into their existing IT infrastructure. And because of its scalability, reliability, and extensibility, they felt that Office SharePoint Server would be more robust than other products they considered.

“Having a robust solution for our company intranet tied perfectly into our desire to move the company into a new era without having to overwork the technology, as we had been doing with the legacy intranet,” says Cathy Tompkins, Chief Information Officer, Chesapeake Energy. “On this point in particular, Office SharePoint Server 2007 seemed an ideal solution.”

Working closely with the Microsoft account team and Microsoft Services, and using the resources of the Microsoft Technology Center, Tompkins' team developed and deployed an Office SharePoint Server–based solution across the enterprise in less than three months. The solution runs on a server farm consisting of two front-end Web servers, an index server, a search server, and a database server running a 64-bit version of Microsoft SQL Server® 2005 database software along with Office SharePoint Server 2007.

Benefits

The Office SharePoint Server 2007–based solution is delivering solid benefits to Chesapeake Energy in areas ranging from ease of deployment to productivity, collaboration, and project management.

Ease of Adoption Leads to Rapid Use

Tompkins is delighted not only at the speed of deployment, but also of user acceptance. “Within the first month after deployment of the Office SharePoint Server–based solution, more than 500 Chesapeake Energy

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employees were very enthusiastic users,” she says.

According to Garcia, one reason for the hearty welcome that users have given the new solution is its ease of adoption. “Managers say it has been easy to instruct users on how to find information through the new solution,” she explains. “As a result, training usually takes no longer than a single afternoon.”

Garcia points out how employees throughout the company are using Enterprise Search in Office SharePoint Server 2007 to access information ranging from phone numbers to business-critical well data. The data they seek might be found in Microsoft Office Word documents or Office Excel® spreadsheets, in line-of-business applications, or within special solutions such as the Frequently Asked Questions forum administered by the company’s CEO, Aubrey McClendon.

“Employees also are taking advantage of a ‘people search’ capability to find organizational connections among employees,” Garcia explains. “As a result, when they need information from a colleague who happens to be unavailable, they can contact a close colleague of that person who might be available to provide the information.”

Enhanced Collaboration Simplifies Projects

Another application deployed on Office SharePoint Server 2007 specifically helps with collaboration across project teams. Yet another implementation provides workspaces that provide employees with a far more efficient collaboration environment than having to depend on file shares and e-mail. And with the document version control in Office SharePoint Server 2007, employees can collaborate on document development without having to send dozens of e-mail messages and without having to worry about versioning problems.

Collaboration among project teams is further simplified now that employees have seamless access to highly personalized content, applications, links, and “smart forms” from wherever they are working. “Comprehensive information access is essential in the oil-and-gas production environment, which is awash in information from diverse sources and reliant on employees often working in very remote locations such as field offices and rig sites,” says Wade Brawley, Vice President of Land Administration at Chesapeake Energy. “Now, through SharePoint sites, field-based employees can access the same information, with the same ease, as employees working at corporate headquarters. This is a real productivity booster.”

Because this collaboration environment is made available through an extranet, the new solution is also enabling Chesapeake Energy employees to collaborate more effectively with its partners and vendors. Says April Gonzalez, Director of Creative Services at Chesapeake Energy: “Marketing and public relations companies, in particular, can access creative elements—such as logos, templates, presentations, and other large graphical files—that would be awkward, slow, and resource-intensive to share using e-mail or surface mail.”

Extensibility Drives Smarter Decisions

Another thing that makes the new solution so valuable to Chesapeake Energy is its extensibility. “In day-to-day use, we find Office SharePoint Server 2007 to be easily extensible for supporting Excel Services, Office InfoPath® [information-gathering program], and other programs,” says Mark Wiley, Supervisor, IT Business Systems, Chesapeake Energy. “We also have used SharePoint technology to create and launch applications throughout the solution, and have done so quickly by using out-of-the-box Web parts to meet pressing business needs.”

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By using the Microsoft .NET Framework for custom development, the IT team has found it easy to deploy custom code and integrate the intranet with other Microsoft applications and technologies. “This enables us to build new forms and workflows, integrate data sources, and do much more than the prior intranet would have allowed,” Garcia adds. “It also supports the company’s growth trajectory.”

In that spirit, Chesapeake Energy is continually expanding the content available on the intranet—in particular, one application that concerns new well projects. “In the past, employees had to launch multiple systems or build sophisticated queries to gather valuable data on new well projects, and then compile the information manually,” Garcia reports. “Now, they can easily access well details such as permits, ownership history, financial reports, and other essential documents that are drawn from nearly a dozen internal systems.”

Brawley adds, “The beauty of the portal is its ability to bring disjointed data all to one place in a way that’s effortless and seamless.”

Moreover, the intranet has been designed so that folders and the documents inside them, such as survey plats and right-of-way agreements, are structured identically for every project. Explains Colleen Magness, Director, Right of Way Coordination, Chesapeake Energy Marketing: “By implementing a consistent structure among folders and documents, we are simplifying information access and helping employees make smarter and faster business decisions.”

User-Managed Content Improves Data Analyses

A big difference between the current Chesapeake Energy solution and its legacy intranet is that users no longer require IT assistance to update content. This saves time

on the part of IT professionals and helps ensure that content is being managed and updated by the people who are most closely involved with it.

Employees seeking new content also find their task easier. Instead of having to filter an entire page to determine which content is new and which is not, they can use views and alerts to be notified when new information is published. What’s more, because content is so easy to post and update in a secure, centralized location, people are more likely to ensure that content is fresh, consistent, and available to the people who need it.

“This improves data integrity, the analyses based on the data, and employee productivity in general,” Tompkins points out. “When you make information fast and easy to find, people use that information in amazing and innovative ways to get their jobs done.”

Powerful System Eases Growth Challenges

Tompkins and her colleagues feel that whatever challenges arise from the company’s continuing growth, they will be able to confront those challenges with the help of Office SharePoint Server 2007. One initiative now being implemented involves going beyond integration of content between the intranet and extranet and establishing complete convergence of those solutions.

As Tompkins goes on to explain, this will mean having one central place for information about Chesapeake Energy that is available to employees, partners, vendors, shareholders, communities, and legislators, wherever the company operates. “Whatever idea we decide to implement on our solution, we are confident that with Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, we can meet our needs and maintain our momentum.”

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For more information about Chesapeake Energy, visit the Web site at: www.chk.com

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