

SHAREPOINT: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PRODUCE TO SHINE

SharePoint Portal is about to get a makeover, thanks to the imminent release of its updated version. David Hurley, managing director of Anglia Business Solutions, explains how the system could revolutionise information integration and sharing for fresh produce companies

IN LAST month's article, we looked at the arrival of Windows Vista and its possible impact on the PC and server infrastructure within a business. The conclusion was that the release of this version of Windows was an important step in the evolution of the operating system. This month, we look at a technology that is often overlooked by the fresh produce sector.

One of the key challenges facing most management teams is how to integrate the various sources of information within a business. In an ideal world, you would visit a single data source to find out what is happening with your products, growers or customers. However, drawing together this constantly changing information across the enterprise, even when it is in electronic format, has proved challenging in the past. The holy grail of a single version of the truth has been parked in the "too difficult" bay for far too long.

Imagine being able to log on to a portal through which all of your customer and product information can be easily accessed. Supposing that it was also easy to retrieve any document relating to any transaction? How about sharing this dynamically updated information with your customers and growers? In such a scenario, are you more or less likely to gain a competitive advantage by offering improved client service while reducing administration?

The reality is that the technology to

do this has been around for some time, in the form of SharePoint Portal. However, with the imminent release of SharePoint 2007, it is about to get much better. SharePoint 2007 features workflow, forms automation, business intelligence and document management. SharePoint will be a dynamic platform for filling the white space between ERP enterprise systems within organisations and the expectations of business users. It will be a launching point for access to key data and information within organisations and will provide the organisation's single-source version of the truth.

SharePoint will allow organisations to create applications for focused audiences that are either not available within existing ERP systems or are too clumsy to arrange. These applications will be put together in portable, manageable components called "web parts", which can be commercially purchased or custom built.

The power of SharePoint is that it efficiently ties workgroups and office-users into business-user communities. It allows users to join forces to rapidly aggregate, organise, pinpoint and securely share relevant business information. The technology empowers end-users and department personnel to easily self-manage their content and messaging, allowing organisations to consistently market and communicate relevant information.

SharePoint also seamlessly



integrates with the most popular productivity software, MS Office. It is a flexible, web-based platform, allowing end-users to be free to roam and allowing organisations to put computing in the hands of today's mobile business user. It can also be comfortably and securely extended to customers and partners to expand the reach and efficiency of existing collaboration practices.

This is another key launch for Microsoft, facilitating strong interoperability between Microsoft products, ranging from Microsoft Office to the popular Microsoft business management solutions.

It also presents an opportunity to explore how senior management can have rapid access to dynamic business information. Business intelligence has been identified as one of the key reasons why chief executives will invest in new technology. In a fast-moving, low-margin industry like the fresh produce sector, such information will become a vital aid to competitiveness in a rapidly changing environment. ○