How Important is the SharePoint Term Store? When and **When Not** to use Third Party Tools.

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Martin Garland has over 20 years’ experience in search, classification and Enterprise Content Management within the broader information management industry. His keen understanding of the information management landscape and his business acumen provide a solid foundation for guiding organizations to achieve their business objectives using best practices, industry experience, and technology. Martin’s expertise has been instrumental in assisting multi-national clients in diverse industries to understand the value of managing unstructured content to improve business processes.

He has focused on sales, marketing and general management, and has expertise in both startup and turnaround operations throughout Europe, the US and Asia Pacific. One of the founders of Concept Searching, Martin is responsible for both business strategy and North American and International operations.
Overview

SharePoint adoption is rapidly accelerating and organizations now have a better understanding of the new features and capabilities that have transformed SharePoint from a content repository to an enterprise class platform that enables management of content as a business process, improves governance, and ensures compliance. According to a 2010 Gartner report, improving business processes ranks as the top CIO priority.¹ As the understanding of SharePoint has matured, organizations are now looking to leverage the native capabilities to capture the value of content and manage it in the context of business processes to meet the priorities of the organization.

Is the Term Store the Panacea to Better Manage and Leverage Content?

The Term Store in SharePoint is Microsoft’s initial building block to enable organizations to natively build taxonomy structures and facilitate the management of large amounts of content, much of which is strategic or of high value to the organization. According to a 2011 Market Survey by Global 360, “The increase in volume of mission-critical content points to SharePoint’s increasing credibility as an enterprise capable platform. At the same time, it points to an increased need of business to manage the content as part of mission-critical business processes, improve their governance of the environment, and protect the assets housed within the platform.”² Organizations need to capitalize on the strengths of SharePoint and selectively evaluate third-party tools where SharePoint can be leveraged to gain maximum return on investment, both from a tactical and long-range approach.

The Nuts and Bolts

For the majority of SharePoint deployments, there are significant advantages in utilizing the Term Store including the protection of the organization’s investment in SharePoint and achieving business objectives more quickly by working natively in the SharePoint environment. Non-integrated third-party solutions often add complex extraneous layers of overhead, cost, and resources reducing the ability to quickly adapt to changing business requirements. For the small subset of organizations that have large taxonomies, taxonomy tools, such as those from Concept Searching can be used outside of the Term Store to eliminate scalability challenges.

Coupled with the Term Store the Managed Metadata Services support the sharing of taxonomies and terms across multiple site collections, all within the SharePoint environment. This promotes the consistency of content tags based on organizational nomenclature and aligns with policies and procedures that will be required to enforce Term Store governance, in fact any type of taxonomy governance. That said, SharePoint only offers a manual pick list approach to document classification and minimal user or administrator management of the term sets within the Term Store which is a major deficiency when deploying in an enterprise setting.

Another key component in SharePoint is Enterprise Content Types which are basically content types published from a central Site Content Type gallery which is called the Content Type Hub, to content type galleries on other site collections (even on other web applications or across farms). If you are looking at SharePoint from an Enterprise Content Management perspective including management of documents and records management, Content Types are instrumental in overcoming end user adoption issues and enforcing records management compliance.

¹ Gartner, The Business unit CIO’s 2010 Agenda, 19 February 2010
Taxonomies – Not a Top Priority – Think Again

A July 2010 SharePoint survey by AIIM[^1] indicated that taxonomy management was the 5th top third-party application being considered for SharePoint. As organizations are now more familiar with SharePoint, perhaps it’s time to revisit the inherent capabilities and select third-party tools that let organizations extend SharePoint across diverse business functions, while protecting their investment and leveraging the core functionality.

Taxonomies are a key component to improve many business processes. Gone are the days of a siloed approach to improve a single application, such as search. With the integration of SharePoint and FAST search solutions, organizations now have world class search products available basically out of the box. Improving search can be accomplished by complimenting the Microsoft search products through add-on products that enhance the search outcomes but do not replace a best-of-breed search solution with non-standard structures from third party vendors.

Utilizing the Term Store, Records Managers can create taxonomy and define Content Types, workflow, and retention rules from one central location and then push these Content Types across site collections or farms. This can also be used for other applications beyond Records Management following the same steps. For example, to identify personally identifiable information (PII), protected health information (PHI) or any information the organization defines as confidential and route to a secure server so it is unavailable for unauthorized use. Taxonomies can also be used to aid in migration as well as Enterprise 2.0.

When to Use Third Party Tools and Why?

**Consider when to use native SharePoint or a necessary proprietary solution.** Clients often mandate a wish to want to deploy Taxonomy Software integrated with SharePoint. Often consideration as to what this statement actually means is given all too little thought and it can be read to mean a number of things.

There are a number of software solutions available in the market today that offer taxonomy solutions that integrated with SharePoint however the degree of integration varies widely. At one end of the spectrum we see solutions that utilize all of the taxonomy management capabilities that Microsoft has included in the standard SharePoint product and then add the missing auto-classification features in an incremental fashion.

We also see solutions that ignore the standard SharePoint taxonomy features and implement proprietary alternatives, just as they did for SharePoint 2007. Most vendors offer one approach or the other.

**Why does this matter?** As discussed previously. In practice, we find that these limitations are not critical for most customers however vendors with only one solution to offer, a proprietary solution latch onto these deficiencies in an attempt to raise them higher on the evaluation agenda.

The main advantage of the approach that builds upon the SharePoint taxonomy features is that it is more compatible with SharePoint, from the user’s perspective, a developer’s perspective and also from the Administrator’s perspective. SharePoint users will use the built-in SharePoint facilities to view and edit taxonomy metadata which works with the any search engines out of the box.

SharePoint developers can customize the SharePoint interface and write applications using the native Managed Metadata controls and not have to learn about non-Microsoft controls. SharePoint Administrators can configure taxonomy metadata by creating list columns and mapping these to content types and sites using native facilities, not proprietary mapping tools.

In summary, unless there is an absolute clear cut necessity for having to adopt the proprietary approach think again as the approach “re-invents the wheel” in a way that will increase risk and costs.

The proprietary approach is likely to involve: additional end-user training, lengthen development

[^1]: AIIM SharePoint Strategies and Experiences Survey 2010  
timescales increase administration burdens and a lock-in to a proprietary product.

**What Can Concept Searching offer?** Unlike most vendors in the space, Concept Searching’s conceptClassifier for SharePoint can offer users either a solution tightly integrated with SharePoint 2007, 2010, and 2013, utilizing all of the “out of the box functionality” including the ability to read and write in real time to the Term Store or, alternatively, a proprietary solution that does not integrate or use the Term Store and relies on Concept Searching’s third party extensions to SharePoint.

In a Forrester report Concept Searching’s conceptClassifier for SharePoint was outlined as a strategic purchase decision for corporations looking for Taxonomy and auto classification solutions integrated with SharePoint.

**A solution tightly integrated with the SharePoint Term Store.** conceptClassifier for SharePoint is unique in its integration with the SharePoint Term Store. Taxonomies (Term Sets) may be built out in the term store and those term sets are read natively and in real time to the conceptClassifier taxonomy manager component where automatic concept extraction from client’s own content is performed and those natural language concepts are offered to the taxonomist (SME) to assist in the building out of the taxonomy classes and the auto-classification clues. As the taxonomy is built out the structure (classes) are automatically written back to the SharePoint term store along with the auto-classification clues which are held as custom properties.

As content is uploaded or ingested into SharePoint it is automatically classified to one or more term sets and the metadata is displayed together with the documents in the SharePoint document library.

This approach is fully compatible with existing SharePoint taxonomy facilities. Users and Administrators can modify the structures (subject to access rights) using either the Term Store or from Concept Searching’s taxonomy manager component. Users can also modify the automatically generated metadata (subject to access rights) using the native SharePoint editing facilities. And the SharePoint, or any search engine will utilize the metadata in the standard search refinement panel without any need for further development or third-party web parts.

Microsoft Search offers a browse taxonomy feature. conceptClassifier has a multi-select tree view control web part that allows users to browse the taxonomy when the Microsoft search engines.

**The downside to Solution One**

- Polyhierarchies are not supported by Microsoft SharePoint term store and individual taxonomies are limited to no more than 30,000 preferred terms.

**The upside to Solution One**

- This approach builds upon what Microsoft provides, adding the missing features in a fully compatible manner.
- As Microsoft enhances the Term Store (for example, to allow polyhierarchies and to increase the taxonomy size limits) then these enhancements are immediately available to customers.
- This is the natural approach for SharePoint Users, Developers and Administrators.

**A Proprietary Solution that does not utilize the SharePoint Term Store.** Concept Searching can also deploy conceptClassifier “de-coupled” from the term store, similar to our solution for SharePoint 2007 and most other vendor’s implementations.

This approach performs all taxonomy management outside of SharePoint and publishes the resulting metadata into a proprietary property format, ignoring the existing Managed Metadata Controls.

In this scenario a considerable amount of custom code must be provided because the native formats are not being used. The custom code provided by all vendors who adopt this approach must include: metadata viewing and editing web parts; search enhancements to replace the native refinement panel which will not work with the proprietary controls.
As in Solution One, clients may also deploy the multi-select tree view control web part and the content type updater application.

**The downside to Solution Two**

- The SharePoint Term Store is completely bypassed.
- Configuration and management of taxonomies will have to be done outside of SharePoint using third party tool sets.
- Linkage between Taxonomies (Term Sets) and Managed Metadata Properties will be lost.
- Integration of Managed Metadata Properties into the Microsoft SharePoint Search for SharePoint search refinement panel will be lost.
- Editing of Taxonomy (Term Sets) metadata using the native SharePoint editing facilities will be lost. Again third party web parts will be required to be used from within SharePoint.
- All Taxonomy (Term Sets) manipulation will need to use custom property types instead of the built-in Managed Metadata Properties.
- Greater risk for clients in that additional third party web parts are required to deliver the solution and all bespoke application development will be forced to utilize non-Microsoft APIs.

All of this will be confusing for users and means extra work for developers and Administrators.

**The upside to Solution Two**

- Polyhierarchies and very large taxonomies not able to be supported by the Term Store are supported in this configuration.

**Going beyond Findability. Concept Searching’s offering for Compliance, Governance and Data Asset Protection?**

conceptContentTypeUpdater (CTU) is a unique application and extension of the conceptClassifier for SharePoint product suite.

Developed as a joint venture with the Microsoft Public Sector Team and Concept Searching to demonstrate full utilization of SharePoint’s Information Management and Information Rights Management policy capabilities, the CTU will enable the client to use the metadata associated to specific data assets to drive the automatic application of SharePoint Content Types. Once documents have the appropriate Content Type based upon content contained within the document, workflows can then be automatically started to ensure proper document preservation and the application of security templates.

In most organizations that use SharePoint documents are often placed in the wrong location, have inappropriate metadata applied, and lack measures to control access and rights management for individual data assets.

Content Types in SharePoint enables organizations to take advantage of the workflow capabilities that can enhance organizational performance while driving down costs. The only obstacle with content type application is that individuals have to decide which Content Type applies to every document ingested by SharePoint. For organizations with a lot of content this is no trivial matter.

Regulatory guidelines associated with records management, information security, and e-discovery drive the requirement for workflow. Organizations without automated processes that enable records declaration, data transparency, and information security find themselves at increased financial risk when it comes to storing, preserving, securing, controlling, and exposing information.

In SharePoint, semantic, records retention, and security metadata contained in the term store has to be applied to every data asset in order to ensure data transparency, records declaration, and to control access and apply digital rights management. Leveraging conceptClassifier for SharePoint organizations are able to automatically apply semantic, records retention, and security metadata.

Using Concept Searching’s conceptContentTypeUpdater organizations can then use metadata associated
to data assets to drive the automatic application of Content Types. Once documents have the appropriate Content Type based upon content contained within the document, workflows can then be automatically started to ensure proper document preservation and application of security templates.

Scenarios include:

- Any document that has a digital social security number and/or vocabulary associated with how the organization collects personally identifiable information will be automatically moved to another document library where Information Rights Management will be able to control how the document is used by those who have access to those documents.
- Documents that have been tagged with retention codes are automatically moved to a Records Center library which can then be a staging area for transfer of documents to an end-state records management system.
- Documents that are for example company confidential can have content types automatically applied to enable workflow and processing around retention, reservation, disposition and security.

**Summary**

Organizations are looking for ways to improve governance, ensure compliance and in turn to capture the value of content and manage it in the context of business processes to meet the priorities of the organization.

SharePoint is maturing and with the SharePoint Term Store to enable organizations to natively build taxonomy structures, facilitate and automate the management of large amounts of content, much of which is strategic or of high value to the organization.

The initial implementation of the Term Store has its limitations, although these are rarely important to any but the largest enterprises and third party tools can deliver functionality overcoming these limitations with the down side that these tools often add complex extraneous layers of overhead, cost and resources reducing the ability to quickly adapt to changing business requirements.

Taxonomies in the mainstream have come of age with taxonomy Management being the ranks as fifth top third-party application being considered for SharePoint however Microsoft and most third party application vendors are still focusing taxonomy as a way to improve search and findability. That is however changing with enlightened forward thinking enterprises using taxonomy to address real issues around compliance, Governance and Risk.

Concept Searching is the only vendor in the Taxonomy and Auto classification space and the only third-party vendor that can offer a proprietary taxonomy solution, for SharePoint, a taxonomy solution fully integrated with the Term Store and a taxonomy and content type integrated solution that can tag content based upon its vocabulary, apply an automatic content type and drive information rights management automatically. In this way Concept Searching is the only Third-party vendor able to deliver a taxonomy and auto classification solution that can be applied to Compliance, Governance and risk business issues.
About Concept Searching

Founded in 2002, Concept Searching is now the industry leader in advanced semantic metadata generation, auto-classification, and taxonomy management resulting in intelligent enabled metadata solutions. The award winning products are the only statistical metadata generation and classification technologies that use compound term processing to generate intelligent metadata from unstructured and semi-structured data. The use of compound term processing, or identifying ‘concepts in context’ enables organizations to more effectively find, organize, and manage their information capital.

Concept Searching’s Smart Content Framework™ utilizes a set of technologies and best practices that encompass the entire portfolio of unstructured information assets, resulting in increased organizational performance and agility. The intelligent metadata enabled solutions are being used to improve search, records management, protection of privacy data, migration, text analytics, and Enterprise/Web 2.0. The solutions are deployed in diverse industries, Fortune 1000 companies, and smaller companies with strict regulations in regards to compliance, data privacy, and information governance.

Concept Searching is a Microsoft Gold ISV and Microsoft’s only managed ISV partner in the metadata enabled migration and compliance application sector. Although platform independent, the Concept Searching Microsoft suite of products uses a single code base able to be deployed in SharePoint 2007, 2010, 2013, and Office 365, providing clients with the choice of on-premise, cloud based, or hybrid environment to best meet their needs. The Microsoft products fully integrate with Windows Server 2008 R2 FCI, and the former Microsoft FAST products.

Headquartered in the US with offices in the UK, Canada and South Africa, Concept Searching solves the problem of finding, organizing, and managing information capital. For more information about Concept Searching’s solutions and technologies please visit http://www.conceptsearching.com and follow us on Twitter and LinkedIn.