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Microsoft Office SharePoint Server (MOSS) at Peerless Technologies

By: Dr. Shu Schiller, Wright State University

Peerless Technologies is an award-winning 8(a), small disadvantaged business (SDB) located in Fairborn, Ohio, whose primary focus is on government defense contracts. It has customers ranging from the Department of Defense, Department of Energy, Department of Homeland Security and others in the government sector. Peerless currently has approximately 60 employees. More than half of these employees work at various locations while the remaining employees work at Peerless' corporate headquarters in Fairborn, Ohio.

Peerless, at any one time, works on 20 different contract proposals and 10 project deliverables. Peerless was experiencing a significant collaboration challenge: work in a structured collaborative environment that enhances work-flow, document control and efficiency internally while working with subcon-tractor partners externally. This creates reductions in productivity, miscommuni-cation, and multiple versions of artifacts floating around in the mix with no one knowing what version is the most current.

To address the challenges, Peerless Technologies conducted a Gap analysis of their crippling collaboration issues. These issues include:

- **Collaboration:** The need for multiple individuals working on any one document or product virtually simultaneously.
- **Workflow:** The need to actively move documents proactively to the right individuals when needed.
- **Processes:** The creation of task assignments that actively promotes proactive workflow.
- **Document Control:** The need to ensure that document versions are meticulously controlled so that zero enhancement/changes are lost and all are incorporated.
- **Security:** To ensure the proper level of security on all documents and repositories.

A number of collaboration providers were investigated. It was after careful analysis and a detailed feature benefit comparison that Peerless decided to base the collaboration solution on the Microsoft Office SharePoint Server (MOSS) 2007 framework.

In the initial project scope determination, Peerless decided it would design this project in a manner that had emphasis on phased approach. The proof of con-cept phase would be to design collaboration sites for each of the functional departments located at Peerless' headquarters in Fairborn, Ohio. These depart-ment sites are; Human Resources, Finance, Contracts, Business Development, etc. The initial site mockups were then created and given to the department representatives. These sites went through a period of refinement where the department representative would communicate the changes that they wish to make to the sites and these changes were then made.

Once the initial proof of concept phase was complete it was then time to move the development into a more global approach. The completion of this initial

proof of concept phase included a number of steps that all required careful coordination. These coordinated steps were to: configure the internal network in preparation of the servers, configure and install SQL Server 2008, configure an Active Directory server and instantiate the Microsoft Office SharePoint Server (MOSS) 2007 instance. All server components were installed on separate physical resources to enable the environment to be scalable in the future. With the initial collaboration environment function Peerless was able to create the proof of concept, departmental sites.

The departmental sites gave Peerless a gauge as to what techniques were plausible and what were not feasible. Each of the sites were created, tested and deployed to the collaboration environment. With the sites created, department representatives were interviewed as to how the new technologies met their department's needs and what aspects needed to be enhanced. After a few iterations of the interview process the department sites were well-developed and highly capable collaboration tools ready for use by their respective departmental units.

The next phase of the collaboration implementation was to make the environ-ment functionality accessible by not only the internal Peerless employees but also team members. To accomplish such a feat, Peerless had to utilize an Active Directory instance that was placed outside of the internal network. This exter-nal Active Directory was used to house the team member's user accounts. A medley of other technologies were also put in place for this project including: an enterprise-grade firewall appliance, Microsoft's authentication server, Internet Security and Acceleration (ISA) Server 2006. This was a vital aspect to the project because it allowed the Peerless employees to be segregated from the non-employee team members; this ensured the security of Peerless propri-etary resources and information. With the proper security measures in place, the next round of collaboration sites were architected. The sites were devel-oped using techniques that allowed them to be rapidly deployed into the pro-duction environment. This phase of the project was to develop sites that would create new communication channels for contracts either owned by Peerless or for those proposals submitted for new contracts. These sites needed to allow access to a number of different user groups from Peerless team members and would require a highly tiered security architecture. A template site was created for these contract sites with a baseline configuration that was determined to be standard among all contracts. The individual contract sites were then given customization changes and any other contract specific attributes that were spe-cific to that contract vehicle.

With the completion of the contract sites architecture, Peerless is now running both collaboration sites for its internal functional departments and those for its current projects. There will always be enhancements and upgrades that will be needed to be integrated to ensure that the highest level of security and practices are in place. Peerless is reaping the rewards of a well thought-out standards-based collaboration architecture. This architecture adds one more capability to their corporate portfolio. Peerless is excited for the possibilities of expanding these technologies to other aspects of the company.