Microsoft SharePoint and the Zombie Apocalypse

> In a *zombie apocalypse*, a widespread (usually global) rise of *zombies* hostile to human life engages in a general assault on civilization.
> --- Wikipedia

> We have just discovered we have 80,000 abandoned Microsoft SharePoint sites on our corporate network.
> --- Pharmaceutical Company Senior Executive

Five years ago many large enterprises couldn't deploy Microsoft SharePoint intranet sites fast enough. Today Northern Light is observing an across the board retreat from SharePoint. Why the sea change? Common complaints include disappointing search results, lack of pre-built functionality for some important use cases, the high level of expertise required to use SharePoint's site admin functions to create and edit content portals, and the IT overhead required to manage and administer SharePoint deployments.

In addition to all this, there is a hidden problem that few companies adequately consider in advance: information governance. When every employee can make an intranet portal and put company documents on it, control of corporate information effectively evaporates. The result is a management, regulatory, and compliance nightmare.

A large pharmaceutical firm realized last year that the company has 50,000 active SharePoint sites on their intranet. What is on each of the sites? Who knows! Is the content on each of these sites current, superseded, or perhaps dangerously wrong? Who knows! Do any of the 50,000 sites have highly valuable information that was expensive to develop and hard to replicate? Who knows!

But 50,000 SharePoint sites on the network is not the bad news. The same pharmaceutical company realized at the same moment that it has an additional 80,000 *abandoned* SharePoint sites on the company's intranet. The original creators of those sites have either left the company, moved on to another job, completed the project the site was for, or just lost interest.

By what process could the organization possibly retire those sites without business risk and legal liability? Whom do you ask to look at each one? How many man-years would it take to review the content on the 80,000 dead SharePoint sites before they are shut-off? (Will 100 man-years do it? Maybe not.) What skills are required to review the material on each of the abandoned

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sites to make a call about discarding it? Virtually every skill, since the content could be about anything. You would need staff skilled in marketing, technology, legal, manufacturing, regulatory, IT, compliance, HR and probably more to do the review. (Good luck tracking them all down!)

From a regulatory and compliance viewpoint, the problem of abandoned Microsoft SharePoint sites on the intranet may be worse than an actual zombie apocalypse.

Companies can alleviate many of these challenges by establishing processes that employees are required to follow when using Microsoft SharePoint sites. And of course, there is an easier and more efficient alternative, at least for market research, competitive intelligence, technology studies, and licensed reports from outside research firms. Instead of letting any user create a Microsoft SharePoint site to house such strategic material, one could use a purpose-built platform that facilitates sound information governance practices. Such a platform could help by controlling what is posted and who can post and who can access the material. Such a platform should make it easy to determine what is in the content repository with powerful search and easy to manipulate reporting.

In this case, the pharmaceutical company that has the 80,000 Microsoft SharePoint living-dead intranet sites lurking on its network had the foresight to put all its market research in a Northern Light SinglePoint portal years ago. As an example of good information governance, before Northern Light SinglePoint this company used to assign three people for 45 days to assemble responses to FDA requests requiring the company identify all the market research supporting a treatment claim. The team had to scour many sites on the company's intranet looking for relevant material.   After SinglePoint started housing all the market research, this same type of request from the FDA could be addressed by one person in 30 minutes. And now the company can be 100 percent sure that all of the research is identified for each request.

So just like in the movies, it *is* possible for the zombies to lose in the end and for civilization to be saved.

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