

Case Study: Filton College

SharePoint on a Virtual Server Farm

Overview:

Client Profile

The College provides full-time courses for over 2500 14-19 year olds in both academic and vocational areas. Over 10,000 adult learners from within Bristol and South Gloucestershire study part-time courses at the College or other locations within the community.

Client Situation

Filton had a poorly used Staff Intranet running on Linux whilst the IT strategy was based on Windows.

Solution

Infrastructure provided by a SharePoint Server Farm based on VMware. A Staff portal was implemented using MOSS 2007. Staff using collaboration tools in SharePoint.

Benefits

- Better and more personalised communication with Staff
- Staff are able to work from home
- More efficient working methods where collaboration tools are adopted
- Improvements in quality on internal processes
- Easier access to all documents using Search



Summary

Filton implemented SharePoint Server 2007 on a server farm running VMware to ensure a high degree of reliability and consistent performance at peak times. As well as delivering the infrastructure the project replaced the old staff Intranet and provided a Staff Portal for collaboration and improved ways of working.

“We needed a consultant with expertise in SharePoint and that was something Parabola certainly had. They made something that would have been almost impossible into a reality.”

Roger Ellis; eLearning Manager at Filton College

Background

Filton’s IT challenges are fairly typical of a large FE college in the UK.

- They have a range of disparate systems (including Moodle, Unit-e and ProAchieve) and integration of these systems is becoming a necessity.
 - The old intranet was difficult to manage and required restructuring.
 - The current Linux intranet platform was difficult to support as the IT department was largely Microsoft skilled. The IT strategy was based on making the most of the Microsoft Campus Agreement and therefore it made little sense to employ Linux support staff.
 - The shortage of physical floor space for servers made it imperative to use Virtual Servers before deploying more servers.

To address these challenges the IT senior management team agreed a strategy based on Microsoft Windows, VMware virtualisation and SharePoint server.

Based on some experience with SharePoint 2003 Filton had a vision of the potential of SharePoint when they contacted Parabola however, the Filton management team were unsure how to structure the portal or really what SharePoint 2007 could offer. It was also recognised that the IT support team at Filton was already heavily loaded and 3rd party assistance would be necessary.

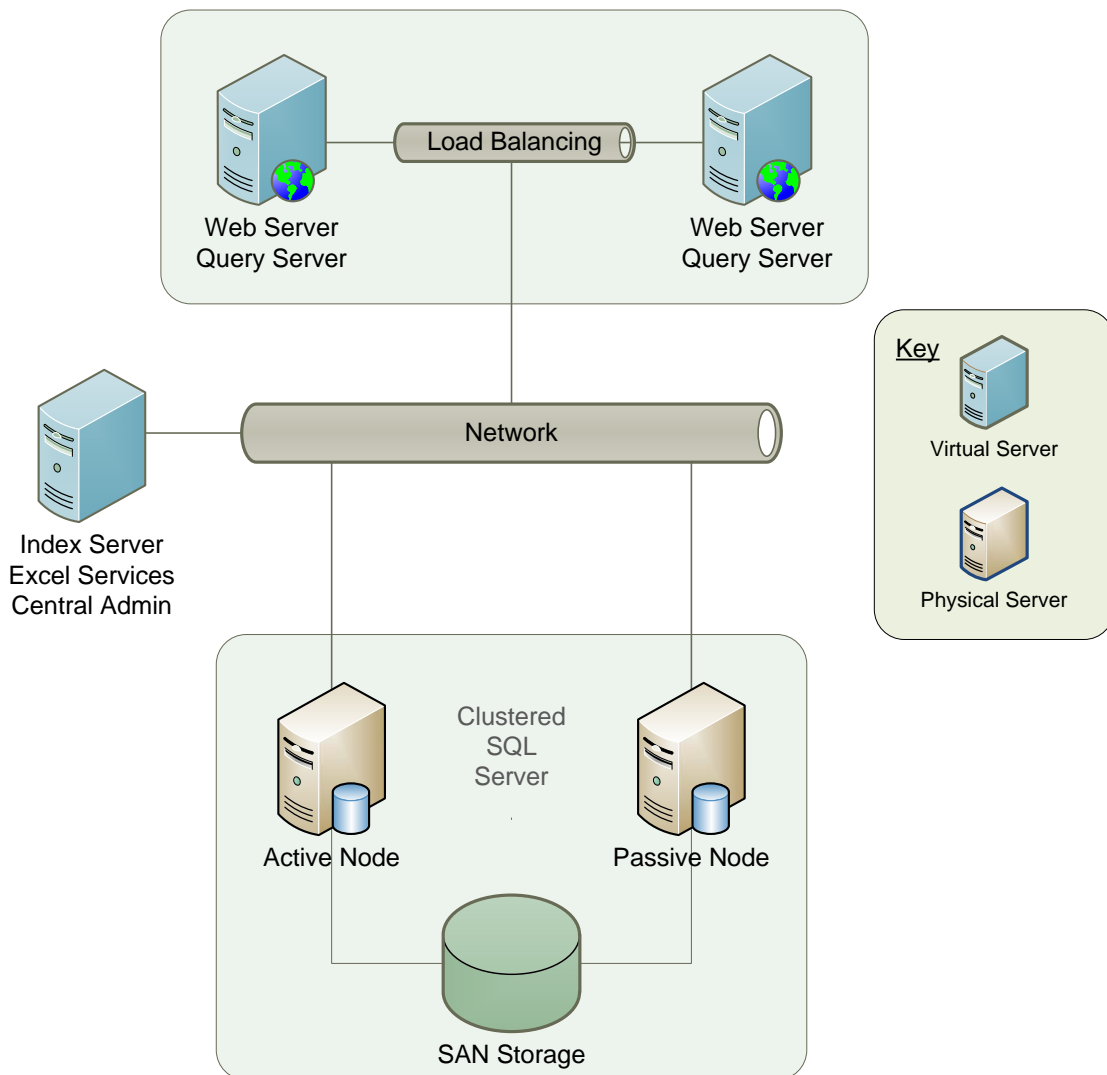
The approach to the project

The initial discussions identified the Staff Intranet as the target for a SharePoint Implementation. However, following an **envisioning workshop** a broader set of objectives and realistic targets were identified and prioritised. The workshop involved both the IT team and the team responsible for supporting the Staff Intranet. This produced agreement on what were the realistic objectives, timescales and a joint commitment to the project.

“I was impressed by Parabola’s systematic, textbook approach – they were completely thorough in explaining things, providing detailed information and accurate feedback,” comments Roger Ellis.

After a **capacity planning** exercise Parabola designed a server farm architecture based on using virtual servers and aiming for a high degree of resilience and performance at peak times. Given the server requirements Filton IT support team produced the template virtual servers with Windows installed. Parabola then installed and configured the MOSS farm including load balanced web servers and clustered SQL server.

SharePoint 2007 Server Farm (Virtualised)



The college web site branding was undergoing change during the project, so the approach was to **develop Master Pages** for the Staff Portal and My Sites which could be easily updated when the new brand became available. The **structure of the Staff Portal** was seen as key to the success of replacing the intranet and the Parabola team worked closely with the Filton Intranet team to find an easy to use hierarchy which represented how staff browsed for information.

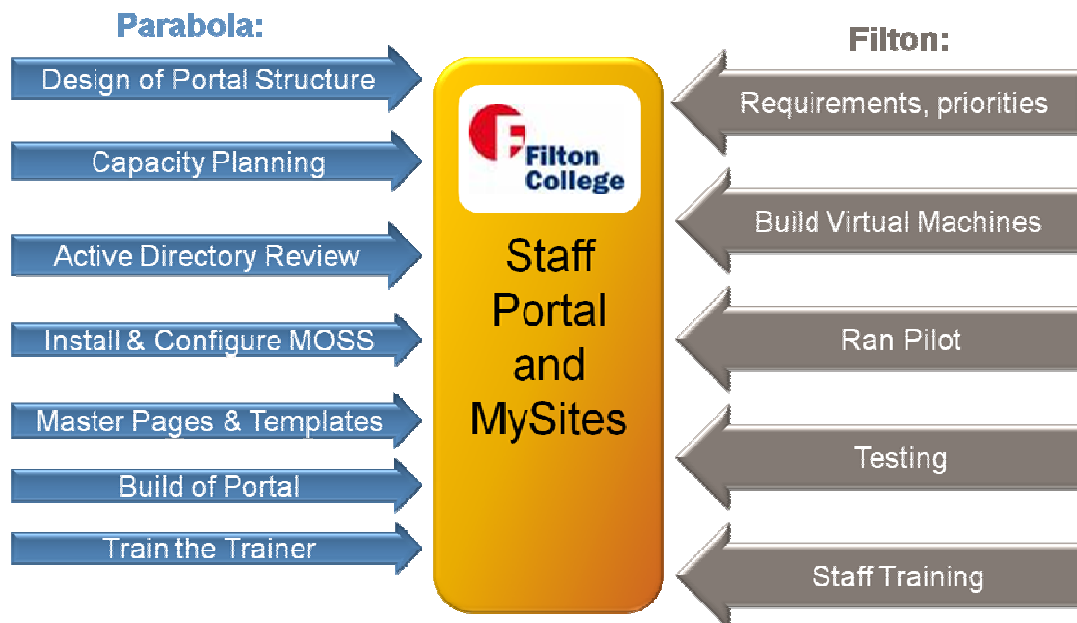
A **pilot project** for 2 departments was completed. This revealed a number of practical problems with migrating the old Intranet and also with obtaining staff time for training in new ways of working. It was decided therefore, to rebuild rather than migrate the old Intranet.

To keep content on the Staff Portal up to date, all staff teams and departments now have **publishing sites** allowing them to share information; including content migrated from the existing Staff Intranet. In addition each team and department also has their own collaboration site for internal use.

Training in using SharePoint and administrating SharePoint was completed on a train the trainer basis. The training was completed on site at Filton using instructor-led examples and hands-on exercises.

Overall the project required a joint effort with involvement of key Filton staff at certain points in the project.

Filton College - Phase 1



The overall **project timescale** was 6 months. The project commenced in May 2008 and Phase 1 went live in October 2008.

Lessons from the Filton project

- VMware presents a viable option for a virtualised SharePoint server farm
- SharePoint Search is a 'quick win' - delivering rapid access to information across the whole college including shared drives
- To keep content up to date on a portal, the responsibility for creating and publishing content needs to be delegated
- Obtaining staff buy-in into SharePoint can be achieved best through real-world examples, training and support for each department

At the end of the project; Roger Ellis (e-Learning Manager) stated:

"Parabola made something that would have been almost impossible into a reality. We needed their expertise, skills and knowledge."

Technology Used

The following technology was used in the implementation of this project:

- MOSS 2007
- Office 2007
- SQL Server 2005
- VMware



References/Links

<http://www.filton.ac.uk>

<http://www.parabolasoft.co.uk/Products/SharePoint/Overview.aspx>

<http://www.microsoft.com/sharepoint/default.mspx>

Further Information

For further details and a quote based upon your particular requirements, please contact:
Adam McCarty on +44 (0) 208 399 5853 or enquiries@parabolasoft.co.uk