



**Connecting**   
Software

White Paper:  
**Document Management in  
SharePoint - Best Practices  
Analysis**

[connecting-software.com](http://connecting-software.com)

# Document Management in SharePoint

## Best Practices Analysis

Whitepaper

Ana Neto

Connecting Software

ana@connecting-software.com



### 1. Executive Summary

Documents and document management are critical for any organization. Microsoft SharePoint is a digital platform widely used for document management and offers a suite of features designed to enhance document handling and organization.

This whitepaper begins by outlining SharePoint's hierarchical configuration, highlighting the role of the Root Site Collection, Document Libraries, Subsites, and Folders. It then discusses considerations for structuring folders, and analyzes six best practices for SharePoint document management, aiming to assist both users and administrators in optimizing their use of the platform.

### 2. Introduction

Effective document management within an organization is important to foster team collaboration, ensure compliance, and protect sensitive information [1].

Microsoft SharePoint is one of the most popular platforms for this. More than just a web-based collaboration platform, SharePoint offers a wide range of features designed to improve document management practices.

This whitepaper explores six document management best practices for SharePoint users and admins.

### 3. Configuring SharePoint for Document Management

SharePoint is organized hierarchically, with site collections at the top level of the structure. A site collection is a collection of SharePoint sites that share a common set of permissions, navigation, and branding.

The Document Center can be a part of the Root Site Collection or another site collection and is specifically tailored for document management. It typically serves as a central repository for storing and managing corporate documents.

Beneath the Document Center, the structure can be further divided into subsites - smaller, more focused sites nested within the main site collection. Subsites are typically used to organize content by department, project, or topic.

The following table presents the main components of SharePoint in terms of Document Management.

Component	Description
<b>Root Site Collection</b>	Serves as the central repository for all documents, regardless of department, project, or topic. Provides a common access point for users to manage documents.
<b>Document Libraries</b>	Primary containers for storing and managing documents. They offer features like document versioning, check-in/check-out, and metadata tagging to facilitate efficient organization and control.
<b>Subsites</b>	Subsites can be created to organize documents by department, project, or topic. This enhances document management granularity and improves navigation.
<b>Folders</b>	Within Document Libraries and Subsites, folders provide additional levels of categorization. Users can group documents based on criteria like document type, author, or date created, enhancing document organization and accessibility.

## 4. Considerations on SharePoint Folders

Folders are essential for organizing and managing content within SharePoint's hierarchical structure. They act as containers for grouping files within lists and libraries, providing a more granular level of categorization and accessibility. For users, they logically arrange their content, making it easier to find and retrieve specific files or documents.

### 4.1. Key Roles of Folders in SharePoint

**Content Organization:** Folders divide and structure content based on specific criteria, such as department, project, or file type. This facilitates efficient retrieval and navigation through the content repository.

**User Experience:** Folders mimic the hierarchical navigation structure of file systems that most users are familiar with. For this reason, it is straightforward for users to browse through folders and subfolders to find the desired content, providing a good user experience.

**Permission Management:** Folders enable administrators to control access to specific files and folders within libraries, ensuring that only authorized users can access sensitive or confidential information. This contributes to data security and compliance.

### 4.2. Defining Folder Structure

By effectively utilizing folders, organizations can create an easy way to access their knowledge assets.

Ideally, a cross-functional team of stakeholders from different departments and teams should collaborate to define the folder structure.

This ensures that the structure addresses the needs of all users and reflects the organization's unique structure and document types. It is generally more effective to gather feedback from stakeholders when there is a proposed structure, as this avoids the need to start from scratch.

## 5. Best Practices for Organizing Documents in SharePoint

### 5.1. Consistent Naming Conventions

Adopting consistent naming conventions for documents and folders is essential for easy identification and retrieval. This includes using clear, descriptive names that reflect the content of the file or folder.

Avoid using abbreviations or names that are too generic, as that might confuse users. For example, if a folder contains Sales Material on the company’s products, it is best to call it “Sales Material” rather than “Products.”

## 5.2. Permission Management

It is crucial to define clear roles and permissions for different user groups within the organization. Each organization needs to decide how detailed access control permissions should be to ensure that users can access the documents they need to do their jobs while maintaining data security and compliance.

For some use cases, organizations should use automation tools to streamline permissions assignment. This is normally done to reduce the risk of errors and ensure consistent access control when documents are created, modified, or moved between libraries.

A frequently cited use case is for documents that come from a Dynamics 365 SharePoint integration [2] [3] [4]. In this case, a tool to automate permissions replication is necessary because the security model needs to be synchronized from Dynamics 365 to SharePoint. The tool mentioned in the above use cases is [CB Dynamics 365 to SharePoint Permissions Replicator](#).

## 5.3. Hierarchical Folder Structure

One of the first actions organizations should take is to organize documents into a hierarchical folder structure that mirrors the organization’s structure or the natural categorization of the documents. This could be based on departments, projects, topics, or other relevant criteria.

To maintain a manageable folder structure, the number of levels should be limited to two or three. Deeper folder structures can make navigation difficult and tend not to make sense to anyone other than the person who created them. Naturally, the optimal number of levels may vary depending on the

organization’s size, document volume, and user needs.

When defining the folder structure, especially when the organization has documents coming from Dynamics 365 to SharePoint, an additional concern should be not reaching SharePoint’s unique permissions limit [5].

## 5.4. Metadata Tagging

When a user uploads a document to a document library, SharePoint adds some document metadata by default. The default metadata for a SharePoint document includes the file name, modified date, and modified by. This metadata is presented to SharePoint users as columns when viewing Documents.

It is possible to add more metadata and establish a metadata schema relevant to the organization’s needs. This provides additional search criteria and possible workflow triggers.

The relevant metadata will mostly depend on what SharePoint users in each organization would like to search for to locate documents.

If, for example, the organization is a legal firm, metadata tagging can be used to categorize documents by case number, client name, type of document (contract, brief, etc.), and date of creation. This would allow lawyers to locate and retrieve relevant documents quickly.

## 5.5. Version Control

Version control is enabled by default in SharePoint, and the best practice is to keep it enabled. However, some settings can be adjusted to make version control adequate for specific organizational needs.

The following table summarizes SharePoint’s versioning settings:

Version Control Setting	Description
Enable versioning	Turns on or off version control for the document library or list
Maximum version history	Sets the limit for the maximum number of versions retained
Track changes	Turns on or off tracking of document changes
Require check out	Requires users to check out documents before editing them
Create major versions	Creates major versions of documents whenever they are modified
Create minor versions	Creates minor versions of documents whenever they are modified

Opting not to use the "Require check out" feature in SharePoint can streamline collaboration by allowing multiple users to edit documents simultaneously, fostering a more dynamic and efficient workflow. However, some organizations prefer to have a single user responsible for the document at any given time and therefore enable "Require check out".

"Create major versions" is used for tracking significant updates or finalized versions of a document, while "Create minor versions" is useful for managing and tracking ongoing edits and smaller changes. As you can see in the table above, it is possible to create both types of versions automatically whenever they are modified, but it is more common to use the "Create minor versions" setting.

### 5.6. Search Technique

Searching for documents in SharePoint can be significantly improved by adopting a systematic approach. Here are key techniques to enhance the search experience:

#### Simplify Search Terms

Use broader terms when you are not getting the results you want. Casting a wider search net will uncover more documents.

Example: Opt for general terms like "report" instead of specific ones like "sales report."

#### Comprehensive Search Scope

Ensure search settings include all content types and all relevant folders.

This ensures no relevant document is missed in the search.

Example: When starting a search while inside a specific folder, SharePoint will only show you the results in that folder. If you get a "No items match your search" message, always try navigating to the folder above or even to the Documents Center, as that will broaden the scope of your search.

#### Employ metadata filters

Conduct targeted searches using document type, author, creation date, or other metadata fields. By doing so, the retrieval of specific documents will be precise and fast.

## 6. Conclusion

In this whitepaper, we analyzed six best practices for Microsoft SharePoint document management. Some of these practices can be applied to other document management systems as well, but our focus was on this widely used tool in the industry.

To succinctly summarize the best practices that were analyzed:

**Simplify Naming Conventions:** Adopting straightforward naming conventions facilitates ease of access and reduces confusion for all users.

**Prudent Permission Management:** Ensuring appropriate access controls, particularly for sensitive documents, is crucial for maintaining confidentiality and security, especially for documents integrated from Dynamics 365 to SharePoint.

**Maintain a Simplified Structure:** An organized and intuitive structure enhances navigability and document retrieval.

**Effective Metadata Tagging:** Employing metadata tagging can greatly enhance search functionalities and streamline document retrieval.

**Utilize Version Control:** Implementing the right version control mechanisms allows for tracking changes and reverting to previous versions when necessary.

Adhering to these principles can help organizations optimize their document management, thereby supporting a more productive and efficient working environment.

## 7. References and Resources

[1] R. Hall, “Embracing Document Management: A Strategic Approach to Modern Business” [Online] Available: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/embracing-document-management-strategic-approach-modern-hall/>. [Accessed Jul 8, 2024]

[2] A. Neto, “Bridging the Security Gap in a SharePoint Dynamics 365 Integration” [Online] Available: <https://www.connecting-software.com/blog/microsoft-dynamics-365-privileges-sharepoint-permissions-replicator/>. [Accessed Jul 8, 2024]

[3] A. Mazur, “How Belgian Social Service Protects Personal Data in SharePoint” [Online] Available: <https://www.connecting-software.com/blog/how-belgian-social-service-protects-personal-data-in-sharepoint/>. [Accessed Jul 8, 2024]

[4] A. Neto, “Improving Document Access at Liebherr” [Online] Available: <https://msdynamicsworld.com/case-study/improving-document-access-liebherr> [Accessed Jul 8, 2024]

[5] D. Gouveia, “How to Break Free from the SharePoint Permissions Limit” [Online] Available:

<https://www.crmsoftwareblog.com/2023/09/cs-how-to-break-free-from-the-sharepoint-permissions-limit-a-winning-strategy/>. [Accessed Jul 8, 2024]

---

## About Connecting Software

Connecting Software is an international company that provides integration, synchronization, and productivity solutions to a global customer base across sectors.

For more information, contact us via email at [office@connecting-software.com](mailto:office@connecting-software.com) or visit the page [www.connecting-software.com/about-us](http://www.connecting-software.com/about-us).

---

## Appendix - Glossary of Terms

**Document Library:** A primary container within SharePoint for storing and managing documents.

**Document Management:** The practice of organizing, storing, and managing documents to ensure their accessibility and security.

**Dynamics 365:** A suite of customer relationship management (CRM) and enterprise resource planning (ERP) applications developed by Microsoft, often integrated with Microsoft SharePoint for document management.

**Folder:** A container within SharePoint document libraries and subsites used to organize and group related files. Folders help create a structured hierarchy, making it easier for users to navigate, manage, and access documents systematically within the SharePoint environment.

**Metadata Tagging:** The process of attaching additional descriptive data to documents,

which helps in categorization and improves searchability.

**Permission Management:** The practice of controlling access to documents and folders within SharePoint to maintain security and confidentiality.

**SharePoint:** A web-based collaboration platform developed by Microsoft, widely used for document management and team collaboration.

**Site Collection:** A grouping of SharePoint sites that share common permissions, navigation, and branding.

**Subsite:** A smaller, more focused site within a SharePoint site collection, typically used to organize content by department, project, or topic.

**Version Control:** A system that tracks changes to documents, allowing users to revert to previous versions if necessary.