

How to start and run a successful SharePoint Users Group (Part 1)

Prepared For

SharePoint Community

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Purpose

While cruising the slopes out in Seattle with a few of the SharePoint MVPs ([Todd Baginski](#), [Jason Medero](#) & [Joel Oleson](#)) this past weekend for the first [SharePointSki](#) get together, the topic arose on how to start and run a successful SharePoint Users Group. In a discussion resulting from a [Joel Oleson blog post on SPUG Governances](#), we came to the conclusion that a detailed step by step guide to getting a users group up and running was in order. There were other guides out there from Microsoft as well as other blogs, but nothing really in-depth with details on what you will face and how to address those issues.

This is by no way the definitive end all be all on how to run a Users Group in fact, I'm sure I haven't run into every issue possible. I like to think with the experience of myself and others that I will note in this 5 part blog entry, it should get you a good head start.

It's important to note that, just because there is a step by step guide here, starting a users group isn't for everyone, it takes a LOT of hard work and a lot of devotion to pull off a successful event every single month. In addition to that, in this professional's opinion, there shouldn't be a huge spike in users groups

created just because of the desire of a few people or a guide such as this. That is not to say that everyone shouldn't go to a users group. I certainly feel that the leverage and usability of a group gets severely watered down if there are too many groups in too close proximity. More to come on that in "A SUG's Personality."

History

[Shadeed Eleazer](#) and I started the [Baltimore SharePoint Users Group](#) back in 2007 riding the tide on the release of MOSS 2007. Shadeed had some previous experience with the Northern Virginia SPUG so when we found ourselves working at the same company, having like ambitions, and living in the Baltimore metro area, we decided to move forward with the Baltimore SharePoint users group.

Steps to creating a SharePoint Users Group

1. Why start a users group (Pros and Cons, First Steps)
2. Users Group Location (Location, Location, **Damnation**)
3. Sponsors (When to say NO!)
4. A SPUG's Personality (Would you date her?)
5. Synopsis (Be a good Steward. Summary and Checklist)

Please feel free to add comments below or drop me a [Tweet](#) to address anything I WILL miss. (Again, there is always extenuating circumstances).

Why Start a Users Group?

There are hundreds of reasons to start a users group. First and foremost, providing an outlet for your specific technology community, at the end of the day the main purpose should be because you care enough to help someone else further their career and knowledge base. The moment the **USERS** are not the priority of the **USERS GROUP**, you should consider handing off the group or dissolving it.

A users group is NOT:

- *A platform for personal advancement*
- *A priority networking group for you to land gigs*
- *A dictatorship*
- *A avenue for financial advancement*
- *Easy*
- *"YOUR's"*

I've seen it and heard it about many other users groups that when the above become the priorities, the overall community will begin to decline. I think the point is made clear here, there has to be a love and passion for the group otherwise, there's no point of having it.

Pros and Cons

Just like anything else there are decisions that need to be weighed out before committing to starting a users group. In my experience here is my pros and cons list (there will be more from your perspective). But these are issues you should be aware of and seriously consider when weighing out the decision to

start the group. These issues will affect every creator differently and maybe extreme in nature, it all depends on the situation at hand.

Cons:

- ***Time consuming.***

If you want to run a successful users group you have to be willing up front to put in the time needed to make it happen. Sometimes things will just fall into place, sometimes it literally will take a year to see something come to fruition. There is no timeline; you need to be ready to take on the time burden. Creating screen casts, web casts, web site updates and design, booking sponsors and speakers, planning events and so on. The more time you put in, like anything else the better the result will be.

- ***Sacrifice***

Cliché as it might sound there are a lot of sacrifices you will need to be prepared to make. I once had to give up tickets to the BCS bowl because in order to have a speaker come out and do a session we had to move our normal meeting day up one week. So the super bowl of college football went on without me while others enjoyed 12 dollar beers and over cooked hot dogs. There is also a certain time away from family you'll need to be prepared to commit to. Being gone every third Thursday of the month may have different impacts on your family life that need to be taken into consideration

- ***A higher expectation***

You will need to be prepared to be held to a higher standard. Not so much that you need to know everything related to SharePoint or the users group technology focus but, you will be held accountable for making sure the information being provided is correct to the best of your knowledge. It should also drive you to learn more and more about the technology you cover.

- ***The Wolves***

There will be times when your patience is tested by folks with ulterior motives. When this happens, for whatever reason, you will need to remain level headed and remember what the foundations of your desire to have the users group was all about. There might be times when you will need to outright stop a sponsor from speaking because of the nature of his/her "hard sell" that is a hard thing to do. Let's face it, people are giving up time with their family to be there after work, there is no reason a sponsor should be cramming a product down the groups throat.

- ***Float like a butterfly, sting like a rabid, foaming from the mouth viper***

Ok, that expression might be a little overkill; however it's important to note you need to always be agile and prepared for ANYTHING. Example, have a presentation lined up in case your speaker's plane gets delayed. Or a backup plan if your locations doors are locked and no one can

be reached. These are all issues I've faced and was successful because we had back up plans ready to go.

- **Financial**

When running a user group there may be a financial obligation that needs to be taken on, for example, food. When we started the Baltimore SharePoint Users Group we had a sponsor that we later found out was leveraging itself for a hostile takeover of the group (seriously) when that was discovered we obviously could no longer leverage that sponsor. As a result we had no food sponsor for some of our events. In this case and a few others where we just didn't have a sponsor lined up, my partner and I have had to pay for food and drinks from our own pocket. Be prepared for situations like this try to keep a stash for a rainy day.

As a note, I mention the takeover situation not to draw attention to that sponsor (which I will not name), but I bring it up to make you aware that to some people/organizations a users group is just another pawn in the game of business. I'll cover this later in our discussions about sponsors.

Pros

- **Meeting awesome people, making lifelong friends**

What else is there to really say here? You will start to build long time friendships with the regulars of your group as well as speakers that come in. So be prepared for random friendship making. In the past 3 months alone I've made 4 new ski buddies that I'm sure we will have many more days on the slopes to talk shop.

- **Making great networking connections**

Again, networking alone shouldn't be the purpose you're in a users group. But it's inevitable that you will start to meet the movers and shakers. Don't be afraid to jump in and shake a little bit yourself

- **A furthering of your own knowledge**

It's a given that you will start to learn a ton about SharePoint. Remember to absorb it while you're doing the things behind the scenes that no one see's. That is one issue I've faced, running cameras, food, A/V equipment etc. It hasn't been rare that I've missed portions of presentations.

- **Public Speaking**

If you do a good a good bit of topic speaking to the group, such as myself (optional of course) you'll start to realize that you're getting better and better at speaking in public. This was a personal advancement for me. If you know me, believe it or not I was not always so open, and I

was terrified to speak in public as well as nervous to meet new people. Since the BSPUG group has been around those fears are practically gone.

- ***Personal sense of gratification***

As you start to see the success of the users group you will begin to feel personally happy for people and their advancements. You genuinely feel good to see other folks come to you and say, "Hey, because of your presentation on putting InfoPath forms within web parts I was able to....." It's a great feeling and one that will NEVER get old.

Obviously there is room for this list to grow this wasn't meant to be all the reasons why users groups are awesome but just some of the main points.

First Steps

There will be some decisions early on that you will need to make to first decide if you have a chance at success and alignments you will need to make in your process to make it work. Along with the final synopsis at the end of my write up these should be taken into consideration first and foremost.

1. **Research other users groups in your area.** There have been times that users groups have been started only to find that there were 3 others in the area, and some even on the same day. In this techies opinion there is no reason to have more than 1 within a 75 mile radius (or major technology corridor zone). If you still want to be involved in a group, contact the facilitator of the other group and see if you can contribute on a higher level.

Obviously there maybe reasons that there is a Users Group close by but still a need for a separate one. Take that into consideration and make the correct choice. There is power in numbers and a great chance of success if resources can be pulled together.

2. **Make sure you are aware of some of the Cons we've listed above.** You will need to be pretty fluid with the ones listed above, as well as accepting of any that come down the pike in your specific circumstances
3. **Know the market!** For example the Baltimore SharePoint Users Group is just north of the major DC tech corridor. As a result Baltimore is always 6-18 months behind the tech curve; our group is smaller than, let's say a New York users group would be. Know the market you're going in and have expectations accordingly.
4. **Organize a location to meet.** This will be covered more in depth in the "Users Group Location" portion of this write up.
5. **Isolate marketing avenues.** In a way a SharePoint Users Group is a lot like a business. You have to market it almost the same way. Taking advantage of networks to get the message out there

about the group. Get involved with the blogs . Here are some other avenues to promote the users group (please send comments on other options):

- [Meetup.com](#)

Meetup lets you post events to the masses

- [LinkedIn](#)

LinkedIn Groups allows you to maintain groups from users within LinkedIn. It's a good place to post up events as well.

- [Twitter](#)

Real time or updates on events going on in your group. This tool gets more and more powerful the more you use it.

- [ISPA](#)

International SharePoint Professionals Association (www.sharepointpros.com) a nonprofit with ties to many MVP's and Microsoft itself, ISPA helps as the go between all the details that need to navigated for events and groups.

- **Other Users Groups (NETWORK!)**

Meet with and go speak at other user's group events. This is so important because in the end, we're all in the business of collaboration. Get other groups to link to you.

- 6. Make a choice!** I live by a personal motto. "It's better to make a choice quickly when the right decision isn't always clear. Because at the end of the day, you didn't waste time wondering what the right choice might be and in the event you were wrong, you figured out the correct path to go." Use this

Please stay tuned for the next segment of this 5 part write up: "Users Group Location (Location, Location, **Damnation**)"

Users Group Location (Location, Location Damnation)

One of the most critical aspects of the users group you'll have to overcome is a **CONSISTENT SUSTAINABLE** location. The users will need to know where the sessions are every month. A consistent place (and consistent area at that place) is so very important.

I've know of nightmares where users groups who will bounce from library to library, conference room to conference room, and move every time another venue has priority. This could be a huge deal breaker of a problem if the area that you have these sessions at are a major metro area. A location that in the matter of 10 miles will mean rush hour gridlock or smooth sailing drive times, not to mention the overall hassle of it constantly telling users a new place to go, breaking that comfort level you once had.

We in Baltimore are dealing with a situation somewhat in the middle. We have a consistent location, but the rooms change frequently because of other events that are planned there that earn the company revenue. We stay because the sponsor is great, gives us whatever we need if they can and have a great lab facility at our disposal, so there are pros and cons that are weighed out on this matter (starting to catch that pattern?).

Centralization

Last year when we had our sponsor debacle and chose to move, we did a survey of all our regular members. In the survey we asked what town they lived in, and where they worked. Why ask such personal information you ask? Well there was a very good reason! We had the option of 3-4 different locations at our disposal, but we wanted to choose the location that had the most to offer and was in the most centralized location. We found that everyone was almost equal distance from proposed new spot. The only exception we had was one lady who it actually made the drive a longer one, however easier (more freeways) at the same time. So it seemed to all fall into place for us.

You obviously will not have this luxury just starting out, because you won't really know who the users are until you actually start the group. In this case the best thing to do is just keep in mind how traffic patterns are, where your tech communities are and try to pick a spot that is convenient to most people and will add to the users wanting to come out each month.

Isolation

The next thing I would address, as I said in my initial overview, is identifying if there are any other users groups in your area. This doesn't mean the same technology as the one you are starting, but any that may interfere or challenge the user to make a choice between the group you are trying to get going and an already established group that may deal in the same line of technology (example: dot net group vs. a SharePoint group). In the spirit of the users group, you don't really want to try to steal members away, that's not the way to go about it. The way to approach it is to offer something that the other group doesn't, make a time that doesn't conflict and give the user the choice to go to one or the other OR BOTH!

Growth

Another important aspect of picking a location is going to be the ability for that facility to cater to your growth. The Users group you start will inevitably be small, that's the nature of the beast, you'll have to get the word out there and until you do be prepared to start off small. There will be a balance you'll need to weigh between logical space now (something small) and a larger space to grow into.

There is a certain lack of appeal to walk into a huge room and yet only have 8 people sitting in there. It honestly is a little depressing. But I will tell you this; there is a lot of motivation to pack out that room every month. It will make you work harder to get more people in the room. The more you can stay motivated to get people in the door and spread the good word, the better.

As I mentioned above, the current location of the Baltimore SPUG has labs. UMBC Training centers is essentially that, a training center. They have a great program in place to image hard drives and get things on them that you need to do real time full group demos. I don't bring this up to specifically pitch UMBC Training (even though they have SharePoint training as well), but I bring it up to point out that when choosing your location look past your current need. We wanted to hold code camps or hands on "SharePoint Saturdays." We leveraged this location sponsor to help us get to the point of logical expansion, so should you.

Accessibility

I can tell you that a place that's hard to find and harder to find a parking spot will turn the Users off very quickly. The first location we had was tucked back in a business park. For first time people coming to the group, it was tricky to find it. Even today our location is just a bit tricky to find, its back off the beaten path as a result we have had a few occasions where users will tell me they looked and looked but couldn't find the meeting place.

Consider a slew of LARGE signs. 8x10 pieces of paper just don't cut it when you're doing 40mph down the road. Once at the correct place, smaller signs guiding the user to the correct session space. A great idea is those "house burglar alarm warning signs". You know the ones like ADT or Brinks or any other alarm company? Well I don't mean the sign itself because that might be much too small however, those little yard signs sometimes come with [solar powered led lights](#) that charge a small battery and at night turn on. These are great to put on your road side signs to shed a little light on dark nights (usually winter time). I'm sure you can find lighting solutions very cheaply online.

Hey their a sponsor right?

Keep in mind a location is essentially a sponsor. You should remember to extend the same perks to your location sponsor as the sponsor that feeds you. But you should also remember that a location sponsor has a lot more leverage in the users group.

When to bail? Let's hope with the group you help establish you never have to address when to leave a location. Ideally you should make this choice once. But as I said in the last part of this write up, you have to be agile, and in being agile that might mean you need to cut your losses and pack up shop for another location. There are a few warning signs you might want to keep an ear to the ground for. First like I said above, you have to remember that a location sponsor holds the most active sponsorship in the SPUG. They have the power to close their doors, impose themselves more than the rest and align themselves over time because they could be the only long term sponsor you have. Be careful when you start hearing "User group brought to you by "X" ", or something to the effect of "we put on the Users group" etc. These could all be very innocent and just another part of the game you'll need to play, but in our case they were indicators to something much more devious at hand.

ALWAYS have a backup plan. Always have a ace up your sleeve in case you need to move quickly. Have everything in order to pass that information onto the users and minimize the time down as much as possible. Be aware of this, I'll cover this more in "Sponsors".

SharePoint Users Group Location checklist:

- Stable Location
- Alternate User Group "Isolation"
- Centralized Location
- Growth Potential
- Accessibility

Please stay tuned for the next segment of this 5 part write up: "Sponsors (When to say NO!)" this will be an important one.

Sponsors (When to say NO!)

This will be my most delicately addressed portion of this write up. There will be times where I seem a little tough, but that's through experience I assure you.

What types of sponsors do you need?

Well that's a great question really; it all depends on how you and the members want to run the group. Here are ones I can think of off the top of my head. They are in order by priority:

Location

Basically what it says. The location sponsor, talked about previously, is your bread and butter sponsor and often the most overlooked. You really need to get a good report with your location sponsor, and you need to be choosy when you pick them. Give your location a lot of thought; it will save you a lot of hassle in the long term. Please read the piece on Locations above.

Food

Food sponsors can be a bit tricky, here's the kicker with that. See the object of a food sponsor is to obviously feed the group. Over the course of 2 years of the Baltimore SharePoint Users Group, we've had everything from pizza to seriously high end catered food. But the problem with food sponsorship is that it's VERY hard to get a sponsor to put money into the group each month for food (sometimes totaling up to 300 bucks), when they don't always see an ROI on investment.

As we said in the Locations portion, ROI is everything in the business game. It will be very rare that you will be able to find a long term food sponsor that is willing to stick with you and shake it up a bit with regards to what gets ordered for each month's events. If you do by chance find one HOLD ON TIGHT! This will be one of the group's biggest assets outside of a location to meet obviously. (Shameless plug, we're currently looking for one for the BSPUG 😊).

Financial Surplus

Let's face it, money talks. I'll be the first to tell you that you CAN run a SPUG on bare bones funding. To qualm the bellies of the educated, it takes a simple few slices of pizza, which I'm sure a lot of us could probably swing, hey maybe even a coke or two. However that's just simply not the best way.

If you can nail down a solid Location sponsor, you've got a great food sponsor and you still have more coming in, take the financial sponsorship. But don't frivolously blow the cash on happy hour drinks. Save it, yes, be responsible and save it. Because as I spoke on above, there will be times where there is no sponsor at all, or you have to front some cash for an event or something of that nature. It happens more than you think.

Hosting

For a while in the beginning we started with our site hosted on my personal Linux server. We used a free PHP CMS believe it or not. We came to the conclusion that this method was free; it enabled us to keep our information fresh, a clean modern look and ability to change features quickly. One day I received an

email from FPweb.net offering to sponsor the users group with a publicly facing WSS 3.0 site. Well at that point we had no excuse not to “eat our own dog food.” So we rebuilt the site and skinning around SharePoint and re launched it. FPWeb has been great to us to date. Try solidifying a hosting sponsor would be a good way to get off on the right foot and be able to get the information about the group out quickly. But if you cannot score a SharePoint sponsor, make sure whatever you present to the world is easy to read, fresh and has correct information about your locations and sessions.

Swag

This one you can probably go without, but it’s worth mentioning. The swag sponsor usually comes in handy if you have a specific special event or an abundance of regular sponsors at your monthly event. My suggestion here is to harness your marketing skills to put off that sponsor until the next event and allow them to sponsor food which always seems to be the hardest part to come by, if you haven’t picked that up yet.

What makes the perfect sponsor?

The first attribute that I would say makes a great sponsor is that they get what the group is about. They understand it’s a community thing BEFORE it is a business opportunity. That’s a hard pill for a lot of sponsors to grasp. In a day in age where ROI is everything, it’s often that agendas get wrapped up into something so simple as a food sponsor.

Another attribute of a good sponsor is they have their stuff together. We’ve had sponsors come through that are ordering food last minute or are trying to throw together a presentation. If they don’t have their stuff together, in the end it’s just going to affect the cohesiveness of the group.

Remember to remain agile in dealing with sponsors, they do bail out, they get other commitments and a lot of the times you just need to fend for yourself. That’s where your role comes in, make it happen in adversity. Plus it will keep you on your toes

Things to look out for

The hard sell

Inevitably you will have a sponsor approach you or has already solidified a speaking engagement at the users group, which would like to present their product. Like I said before, unless it is someone in the community whose sole intent is to come and spread the gospel, and there are quite a few, company based speakers are coming for the purpose of selling. Regardless of how they choose to pitch it to the group, they want to sell their product. There is nothing wrong with this, in fact it helps the community overall HOWEVER, you need to go about it a specific way.

How we go about it at the Baltimore SharePoint Users Group is like so. When we have vendors come in to present their products we have two options available. A 10-15 minute full on sales demo, they can pitch it as hard as they want but for a short time so it doesn’t get too old and it gives the users of the group something to look for (the end of the presentation) if the pitch is just too over the top.

The other method is to allow a vendor to have the entire session. GASP! What's that you say? That's insane? Well maybe not, what if you required the vendor to demonstrate what their product does but without actually using their product at all. We've had CorasWorks come out a few times and they're great at this.

As I said in some of my Cons above, the hard sell downright sucks. No one, including myself, wants to give up their weeknight just to hear how awesome a product that cost a lot of green is. That gets really old after the first twenty minutes. But what if a vendor, in order to show how awesome their product was had to demonstrate how you do something in SharePoint (any technology) without using the product, if it can even be done? They can give the users some good knowledge on how to solve a real world issue without the use of their product walk through the entire process. And then at the end come in with the "oh by the way, our product does all of this, like so...."

It always seems to go over well because you're not wasting the users' time. You're teaching them how to do something regardless if they buy the product. Now you will need to discuss this approach with the vendor before hand and make them aware of your expectations and make sure you are all on the same page. This can be hard to understand for some vendors because they are usually used to a possible buyer wanting them to come in and pitch their product. Make sure you also reiterate this before the session starts.

The assuming

Hopefully you and your partners have worked hard to make the group about the technology community you serve, unbiased and totally neutral. The scariest thing you can come up against is an overzealous sponsor that literally tries to infiltrate the inner functions of the group. Imposing its will and in some cases try to even take it over. Crazy you say? Well think twice because it does happen. Be aware of this; don't misunderstand the desire to help with the desire to overtake.

Don't be paranoid! This pushes people away, granted paranoia seems to set in easier when you have one person putting the time into planning and pulling off each session. Having another person there to pick up the baton when you need a break, sound board off of and keep you on track will always help when the crazy invades. It's ok just stay established and stick to your guns.

Notice throughout this entire write up so far, and to come you have never seen me describe the BSPUG as "My group." You shouldn't do this and neither should your sponsor. If that mentality shows its face, address it quickly and make sure everyone's place is understood in the grand scheme of doing the right things for the group.

Company run users groups

Let me preface this section by saying that there are a lot of users groups out there that are put on directly through an established company. Please understand that this is not bad, this can be the best thing that ever happened to that area's tech community. However it does take the neutrality out of the equation, so it is important to for the folks that run the sessions to keep themselves and the group as a whole in context.

There might come days when a competitor company has a staff member that although is part of the group, but is also an employee of that company. You will need to make the right decision for the group and be ok with potentially losing business that day. You will need to “not be so seriously about yourself.” Remember the context of the organization and roll with the collaboration, because at the end of the day that’s where it’s at.

Like I said above, being put on by a company could be the best thing that’s happened to the group. It will give you more leverage and funding to do some of the things you want group to be able to experience. If you are part of a group that is run by a company, make sure you remind them to keep the propaganda to a minimum and focus on the group as a whole. If all that is taking place, it could be a great ride.

Aim high, but don’t forget the little guy!

We’ve had sponsors from Microsoft to very small organizations up and coming. Keep in mind, it’s not always about the big names, it’s about the companies that “get it” and are willing to further the cause. Some of the easiest sponsors we’ve had to work within the past, have been the easiest to work with. Keep an open mind about your sponsors and treat them all the exact same, no special treatment for any of them (outside of packages you might sell) but maintain an even keel for all.

Having a good understanding of the potential pitfalls and the ways around them can dramatically help you to make the right decisions when the chips are down.

Please stay tuned for the next segment of this 5 part write up: “A SPUG’s Personality (Would you date her?)

A SPUG's Personality (Would you date her?)

Every SPUG has its own personality it seems. Some are strictly run (maybe too much), others extremely loose and all of the things that come along with those states, and everything between. You as the founder/organizer are the front lines in mapping how the users group will feel to new and long term users.

There are a few things specific things that set the stage for a warm, welcoming and ultimately strong user base. Here are a few:

Website and its features

In the end a users group is there for the sole purpose to assists the users in as much in the technology you focus on AND normal everyday life perks. At BSPUG we have a few heavily utilized portions of our website. Prior to getting on that topic a few more words about your website overall, just to reiterate the point made above. The site should be easy to navigate, **FRESH**, and welcoming. Those are the top priorities; it doesn't have to be a SharePoint site at all, just K.I.S.S. If you go to <http://www.BaltimoreSug.org> you'll see hopefully what I see, a well thought out organized vibrant site with options.

KnowledgeBase

The BSPUG knowledge base is essentially a SharePoint discussion board. It allows users to have access to the breadth of knowledge in the group in a simple post. If you decide to sign up for membership on our site, you are given the choice to be on this forum, which sends an alert email to you when a new item is posted. This gives users and readers an opportunity to have another layer of help when trying to work through a technical issue. Remember to extend rights to the user allowing them to manage their own alerts, 15 emails in quick succession could be a bit annoying if they don't have a chance to ignore them and ultimately will just get blocked as spam.

Job Listings

Admittedly our job board has not lived up to my expectations, but we're working on that. We have in place something similar to the knowledgebase but for job openings from our sponsors. There are many ways you can handle this but let me put a few ideas in your head. Keep in mind that every recruiter in the nation will be emailing you asking to post their job on your site, RESIST! My advice is to only allow sponsors of the group to put their jobs on the site. This does a few things, first allow you to manage the flood if you are clear on this page that you only allow sponsors. Next it's a resource you trust and feel confident in extending to the users (trust is the key word there), and lastly it helps build relationships with the group and sponsors who can help you along the journey.

Event Calendar

This doesn't mean just the SPUGS events but conferences, best practices conferences, SharePoint Saturdays, SharePointSki events, and OTHER SPUG events. Keep this fresh and up to date and it will promote to the users there are other events out there to participate in and ultimately the strength of the community will grow. Try to be the first person to pony up and declare you are attending this event, that confidence moving forward will hopefully drive other users to do the same.

Tutorials

Again, admittedly we don't do a great job with this at BSPUG but we're trying. Video tutorials are a great idea to help spread a technology. There are a ton of tutorials out there both on YouTube and other video sharing sites. If you do nothing more than compile and embed some of the great ones out there on the users group site, you're ahead of the curve. If you can go the extra mile and create and publish tutorials by you and the other users you're that much further ahead.

Links

The good ole link section has been around on the web since its creation. There is a reason for that; it's an effective way to share other sites and resources to your reader base. On the BSPUG site we have broken down almost every aspect of SharePoint into categories such as design, web parts, architecture etc and posted links to articles we find as we do our day to day jobs. It makes for a great resource section, spreads the words and gives an index of easy to find issues.

SPUG sponsored events

Keep in mind that an air of confidence and consistency will transfer to the users. When you promote SPUG events, promote them as though it's a common practice and you just got to be there. This will plant a desire in the users in a way that being timid and pleading with them to attend cannot.

Code Camps

If you can pull off such an event try to have 2-3 per year. A code camp is essentially what the title suggests, one or two days, usually on the weekend to have a machine in front of each user and physically walk through technical AND non technical practices. There are logistical stipulations to this obviously but if the resources are available please take advantage of this. It will help build your local community, gives users the access to a more hands on environment and most importantly should be FREE.

Special Events

Try to be the host of special events outside of your typical session. For example, host a SharePoint Saturday (BSPUG's is July 25th 2009), have happy hours (free if possible), Skiing events or any other group building event. Be prepared these won't always attract a full house but the simple fact that you're out there every month or two trying speaks volumes to the dedication you have for the group. Don't assume doing these things will be easy all the time, finding a sponsor to pony up a few hundred dollars so you and some friends can enjoy a few drafts gets difficult. We usually hold our free happy hour every year (BSPUG's is June 18th 2009) we can wrap the celebration of another year around the event.

Don't be afraid to shake things up, host the event even if two people show up. It's not everyone's idea of a good time to have fifty caliber sized paintballs hurling at them at 120 feet per second, but if you can just get them out there you might be able to wrangle in a user for life.

Special Speakers

In the right circles the SharePoint community specifically is very giving. There are a lot of MVP's and profile speakers that are willing to drive many hours or buy expensive plane tickets for the sole reason to come to an event, find those circles and start to mingle, interact with other users groups, if they'll

have you (unfortunately not all of them are willing) and be flexible with people and their time to have them out. A great way to make some connections is directly on twitter, filter on #SharePoint and you'd be surprised how deep the community goes.

Survey's

Ping the users semi often to get their take on how things are being run. What they would like to see and what they would like to hear about. You are just a means to serve and to fully serve means to be ready to hear what is not being done correctly, making changes and pushing forward. Keep them anonymous sometimes you take to heart negative criticism, putting things in place to make sure you don't know who says what will help everyone in the end. We've done these two ways in the past, both online and paper form at the sessions themselves.

Plan

Have monthly meetings with the folks in the group responsible for things in the group. Talk about concerns and issues you might have both with each other and with how to implement events and survey results. Use "Committees" sparingly, nothing tears down a Republic faster than people who hold priority over others. However it might be wise to use the "regulars" as trusted advisors to the group. These folks are devoting their time almost as much as you are to attend the events, see what they think directly. A word of caution though, never address this committee as anything more than a loose set of advisors and never publically to the group overall.

Would you date her?

Overall that's the question that you need to answer, will the users consistently take time out of their months to come out and hear someone talk. The points above will help guide you through ideas and what to expect moving forward. Keep it inviting and warm and you'd be surprised the turn outs you will get.

Please stay tuned for the next segment of this 5 part write up: "Synopsis (Be a good Steward. Summary and Checklist)" the final wrap up in this series.

Synopsis (Be a good Steward. Summary and Checklist)

Now that you've read the ups and the downs, the cost and the rewards and you're still ready to jump in, let's go over a few of the major points we talked about. Note: do yourself a favor, if you skipped down to this portion of the paper, go back and read it from start to finish, yes I know it's a bit long winded but I assure you I've added some funny antics to make the reading easier. On top of that its instrumental in the overall process to understand what you're getting into. The purpose of this article was simply to fill in the gaps of the few articles available through other avenues currently. In my opinion this has been a fairly detailed and extensive write up on your upcoming adventure.

Important Items

- Hammer down your intensions
Make sure you're getting involved in this community for the right reasons. It's a support and service role. There should only be passive self advancement.
- Understand the pros and cons
Know what you're getting into, the time commitments, issues you'll have to deal with how to deal with the wolves and how to be the viper. The money it might cost you and the personal satisfaction you'll get out of the endeavor.
- Get the location nailed down
The most important part of the deal, get a stable suitable location to help the grow the group as much as possible
- Sponsors
Try to nail down as many full time sponsors as possible. It's really hard but will make your life easier in the long run. No more worrying about food, swag etc. Watch out for the hard sell and the takeover plots (seriously).
- Make sure folks want to attend
Try to anticipate your audience, what they will like and what they won't. Once you're in the door, keep a finger on the pulse of what the users want to see/hear. Anonymous polls work great.
- Support
A good support system is great to have a place. A number two, or a informal board of trustees to get advice from could come in helpful when in a bind.

I've enclosed a checklist that might help in getting the group started. It shouldn't be a supplement for experience or at very least reading this full paper but it will offer some guidance.

Thank you for reading, GOOD LUCK and special thanks to Todd Baginski (MVP), Joel Oleson, and Jason Medero (MVP)

Reason for starting

- I understand this is not MY users group
- I understand this will not always be easy
- I fully understand the potential and unseen Pros and Cons
- I'm interested in this technology
- I don't want to do this solely for self advancement
- I want to be a steward to help others

First Steps

- Research the local area, and know the existing groups
- Researched the International SharePoint Pro's
- Understand the local market for that technology
- masking tape or sewing tape (for last-minute ripped hems)

Location

- Found a Consistent location
- Has potential for growth
- Located at a suitable middle ground

Sponsors

- Food
- Swag
- Speakers
- Location
- Financial
- Hosting

Personality/Services

- Knowledgebase
- Jobs
- Events Calendar
- Resource links
- SharePointSki Events
- Surveys and Polls
- Newsletter
- Website
- Tutorials
- SharePoint Saturdays
- Partnership with other Users Groups