

Top Ten Tips for Web-based Collaboration in SMBs

Web-based collaboration software can be a powerful tool for small and medium businesses (SMBs) managing vital projects. Employees and outside partners become more effective by using Web-based workspaces to communicate ideas, coordinate tasks, and develop collaborative business processes. Managers save time and effort by using the centralized workspace to assign tasks, coordinate activities, and oversee the progress of project deliverables.

The following tips can help you select Web-base collaboration software that offers all the features you need to get your entire team working together effectively.

1. Create workspaces that are easy to administer

Web-based workspaces are more effective and adaptable if they are easy to set up, configure, and manage. IT involvement should be minimal after the initial setup. Any authorized user should be able to quickly create workspaces for projects, add team members, and assign roles and tasks without IT assistance.

2. Make it easy to use your workspaces

Team member should need minimal training to access a workspace and easily locate material. Avoid collaboration software that creates multiple, disconnected workspaces built around single documents, files, or meetings. As a project become more complex, team members shouldn't have to track URLs for each piece of material in the project, resulting in confusion and delays.

3. Get the tools you need to manage deliverables effectively

Out of the box—without requiring customization and scripting—your software should enable you to manage deliverables for long-term projects which include multiple tasks and team members. Managers must be able to assign owners, create tasks, set milestones, establish deadlines, and track the progress of tasks. Team members must be able to view assignments and begin executing right away.

4. Select software that supports business processes

Collaboration software should be flexible and configurable, allowing you to quickly set up, customize, and use a wide range of business processes and workflows. Projects can grind to a halt if each new workspace requires custom coding and IT development. With each completed project, employees become better at sharing knowledge, developing work skills, and improving business processes.

5. Provide cross-project task and status visibility

Managing projects is much easier if team members can update their own progress and supervisors can monitor events and tasks across multiple workspaces. Managers can keep close tabs on events and schedules if they have top-down visibility into individual projects or larger portfolios of connected projects as they evolve. Select collaboration software that makes it easy to see tasks and statuses across multiple projects.

6. Enable collaboration with team members outside your company

If you work closely with outside companies such as partner or suppliers, you might want to give them access to your collaborative workspace. How easy is it to add and manage external teams? Some collaboration software requires that you customize Active Directory with accounts for external users. IT assistance is required each time you add or remove outside team members. If you plan to add outside team members to your workspace, select software that makes it as easy as possible.

7. Ensure team members can work from any location

Collaborative Web-based workspaces allow teams from different departments and companies to work together as if they were in the same room. But can all your team members participate regardless of their location? If you have team members across the country or in other parts of the world, make sure your collaboration software allows them to work across time zones.

8. Make sure your workspace is secure

Security is a primary concern when sharing information. Your content must remain readily available to team members while confidential information is protected from unauthorized access. Some collaboration software handles security through Active Directory, requiring IT assistance each time you add or remove outside team members. A better choice is software that allows new members to be quickly added or removed from a workspace with full security without requiring IT assistance

9. Determine if access permissions are needed at the file and folder levels

You might want to give some individuals access to particular files, while preventing others from accessing that information. Some collaboration software sets security at the site and library level only, so individuals have all-or-nothing access to content. If you need a finer level of security for specific files (for example, to comply with government regulations on data privacy) look for a solution that allows you to adjust access at the folder or document level, ideally without seeking IT assistance.

10. Look for flexibility and scalability when adding users

Make your Web-based collaborative workspace as flexible and scaleable as possible so you can easily add new members as you grow. Look for collaboration software that supports the most widely used desktop operating systems as well as a variety of browsers and e-mail clients. Your collaboration software should scale as your business grows and allow you to add new groups of users quickly and cost-effectively.

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