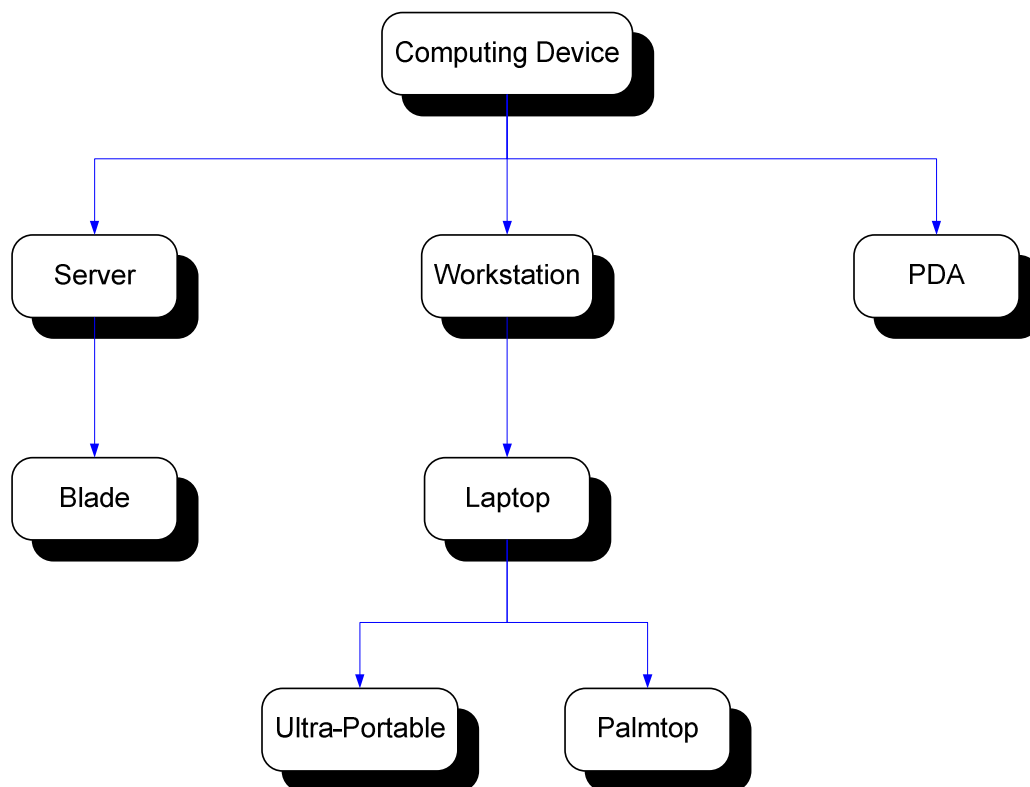


SharePoint Site Taxonomy

By RDA Principal Architect Steve Stefanovich

Taxonomy, simply put, is the act of classifying things. For example, a taxonomy of computing devices might include workstations, laptops, PDAs, ultra-portables, and servers. A laptop is a type of computing device and it has specific characteristics that classify it as one, yet also differentiate it from other types of computing devices. A PDA is a computing device but it is not a laptop. The characteristics might be screen size, form factor, power source, or something else. In any case, the classification of laptop then becomes a term that simply describes a set of characteristics.

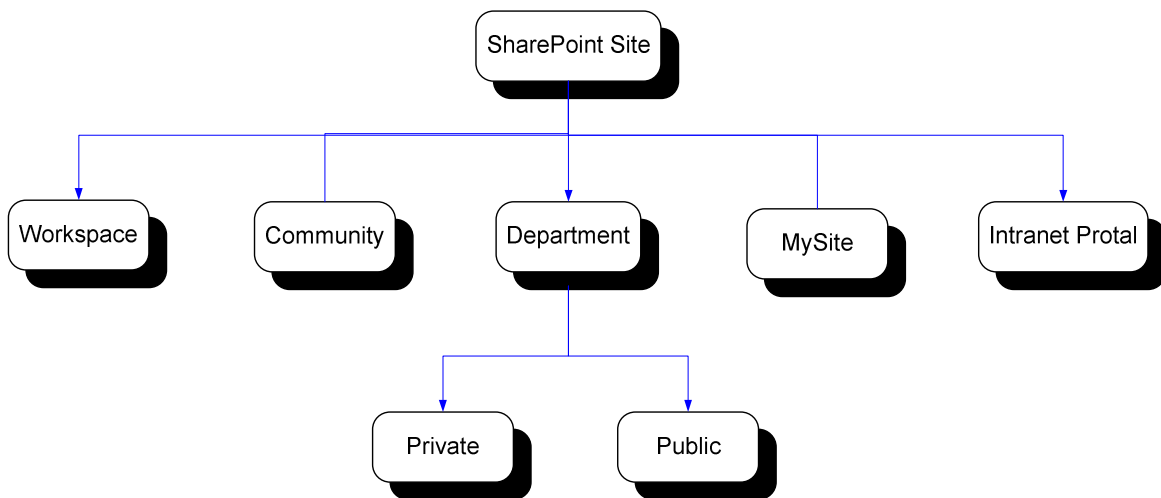


Having this taxonomy allows us to communicate in a very concise manner. When someone uses the term laptop, you know immediately what they are talking about. When dealing with requirements, this is very important. If someone were to say “I need a box big enough to hold a computing device,” that is not particularly helpful because the statement is much too general to be useful. If instead they were to say “I need a box big enough to hold a PDA,” that is much more helpful and gives you a better opportunity to select an appropriately-sized box.

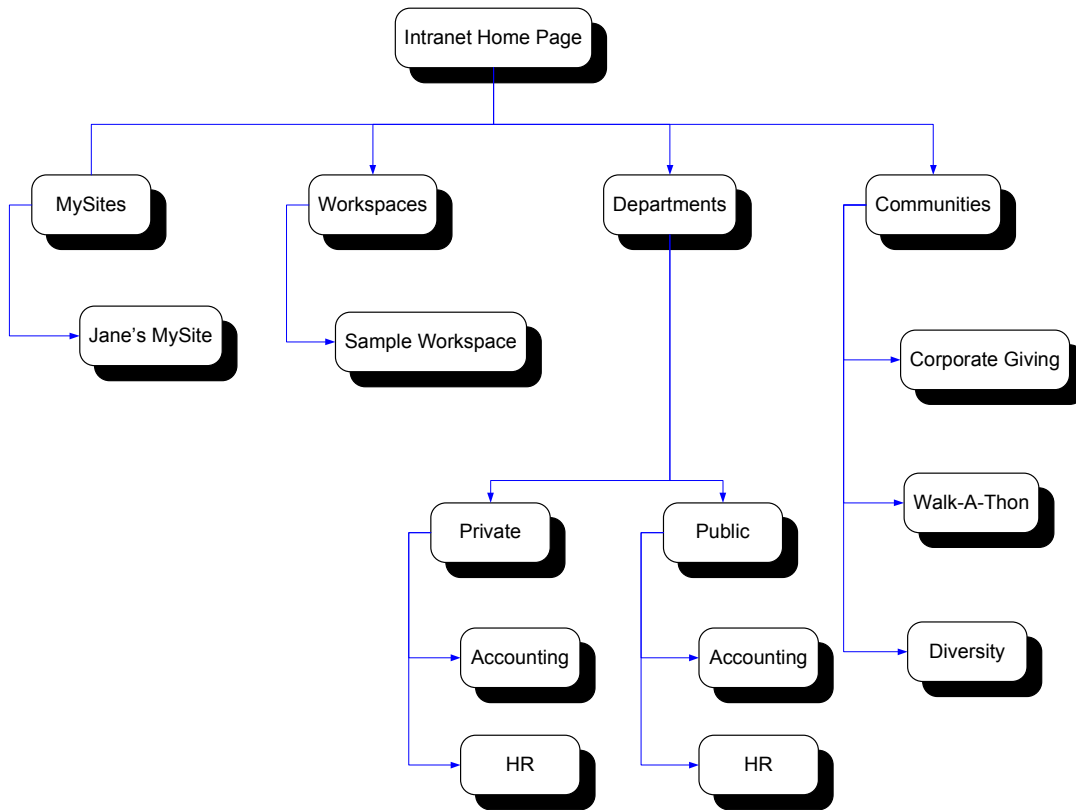
Like computing devices, SharePoint sites are an example of a set of entities that can benefit from taxonomy. While it may be true that all SharePoint sites share a common set of characteristics, they also have differences that make taxonomy useful:

1. What type of content does the site contain?
2. Who can view the site?
3. Who can manage the site?
4. Who can publish content to the site?
5. What is the site's URL?
6. How much space can the site consume?
7. What does the site look like?
8. How long should the site remain active?

What benefits does having a SharePoint Site Taxonomy provide? From the end user perspective, it gives us a starting point for information architecture and - more specifically - navigation. Consider the following SharePoint Site taxonomy:



Using the site taxonomy above, it becomes much easier to imagine a navigation system for a corporate intranet.



Without having established the taxonomy first, it would have been difficult to come up with a consistent structural and navigational pattern. Related to this navigation design is the actual URL design of the sites. Again, using the taxonomy, it is simple to imagine a basic URL pattern for all sites:

- Intranet.company.loc
 - Intranet.company.loc/mysites
 - Intranet.company.loc/workspaces
 - Intranet.company.loc/workspaces/sampleworkspace
 - Intranet.company.loc/departments
 - Intranet.company.loc/departments/private
 - Intranet.company.loc/departments/private/accounting
 - Intranet.company.loc/departments/private/HR
 - Intranet.company.loc/departments/public
 - Intranet.company.loc/departments/public/accounting
 - Intranet.company.loc/departments/public/hr
 - Intranet.company.loc/communities
 - Intranet.company.loc/communities/corporategiving
 - Intranet.company.loc/communities/walkathon
 - Intranet.company.loc/communities/diversity

Again, the structure flows from the taxonomy and provides us with a clear and scalable methodology for organizing different types of sites.

From an IT perspective, the taxonomy drives much more than how sites and navigation are presented to the end user. The taxonomy provides a consistent framework for making decisions about sites and how they should be provisioned and governed. Rather than treating every site as a custom entity, asking questions that allow for the classification of a site can enable IT staff to easily make decisions regarding the configuration of that site. Some pertinent questions might include:

1. How long does the site need to exist (is it permanent, short-term, or long-term)?
2. What kind of and how much content is expected for the site?
3. Who should have access to the site?
4. Who will be able to create and edit content for the site?
5. What is the purpose of the site?

The answers to these (and other questions) can help IT staff classify the site. The taxonomy can be applied to a standard set of properties within the organization such as:

- Disk space quota
- Default look and feel
- URL Path
- Backup schedule
- SLA
- Content Types

For each classification in the taxonomy, these properties are pre-defined easing the burden of site provisioning and, eventually, allowing for it to be automated.

The taxonomy provides much more than a common set of terms, it provides a foundation upon which future decisions are made. It provides a scalable hierarchy that allows a SharePoint deployment to grow in an organized, predictable, and understandable manner.