

## What Does SAP Stand For?

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One Man's Wacky Search to Find the Truth Behind the Acronym

by Jon Reed, JonERP.com

Jon Reed's Introduction: A couple of years ago, after being asked "What does SAP stand for?" one too many times, I put together a tongue-in-cheek article on the subject for SAPtips. It has appeared in many places on the web, but I thought it deserved a home on JonERP.com also.

"What Does SAP Stand For?"

It's a question that haunts me. You see, people are troubled by acronyms they don't understand. Whether they need to know the answer is not relevant; their troubles will continue until their brains have a satisfactory definition. To this day, I receive frequent emails asking me to explain what SAP stands for. I guess I should be grateful for email; if it didn't exist, I'd get phone calls instead. The calls would go the same way, with me trying to decide whether to blurt out: "Don't say 'sap', say 'S' 'A' 'P'."

Correcting people over the phone always seems rude. Confession: I used to derive some petty satisfaction from showing people I knew more about pronouncing SAP than they did. But that was only on those "TGIF" days, and if you don't know what TGIF stands for, you will by the next phase of your SAP project.

Surprising factoid: over the years, many of the folks who asked me what SAP stands for were not even interested in the field of SAP. They were simply in the middle of conducting some online business and were annoyed to run into an acronym they could not decipher.

The most common member of the "what does SAP stand for" gang is the "I'm new to SAP" person, or, more accurately, the "I want to be new to SAP" person. Mean recruiters call these folks "wannabes", but only because companies won't pay recruiting fees for them anymore. Back in the mid-90s, nobody was mocked as a "wannabe." Everyone who had the word SAP on their resume was worth a \$25,000 recruiting fee, whether they knew what SAP stood for or not. And if they had seen a live instance and configured a couple of screens, they could be as "sappy" as they wanted.

{mosgoogle} I've been writing and recruiting in SAP since 1995, and it's now time to reveal an unflattering secret. For the first three years, when someone asked me, "What does SAP stand for," I gave them the wrong answer. "Structural Analysis Program," I told them, with all the certainty of a world-class expert. This definition is, of course, patently and completely wrong. I will say, in my defense, that it sounds cooler than any official definition.

Say it aloud: "Structural Analysis Program" rolls off the tongue with an authority that suits one of the biggest software companies in the world. Unfortunately, we can't start a movement to turn this into the actual definition because it doesn't

make any sense, and never did. In the mid-90s, SAP was much more operational than analytical. The rise of BW does give some (belated) credence to my assertion of "structural analysis", but the release of Knowledge Management (KW) and the integration of unstructured data into SAP renders my so-called definition permanently irrelevant. I have no hard feelings about this, but if, at a future ASUG event, I happen to run into the consultants who originally gave me this bad definition, I will tie them to a chair and make them listen to Microsoft's presentation on Mendocino over and over again.

When I finally learned that "Structural Analysis Program" was not the real definition of SAP, I was more than a little chagrined - not to mention humbled - by the horrifying image of SAP consultants all over the globe being corrected when they confidently offered up the definition provided by "Jon Reed, SAP career expert".

In my defense, I am not the only one to bungle this up. Recent terminology surfing found not one, but two incorrect explanations.

The good people at TechTarget are misleading another generation of want-to-be's with their "expert" answer to this nagging question. I won't name names here, but according to this link in their "Expert Answer Center,"

"SAP stands for System Application Program."

Close, but not close enough for an "expert".

TechTarget can breathe easy, though: they are a distant second in the misinformation derby. According to Tech Encyclopedia,

<http://www.tech-encyclopedia.com/term/sap>

"SAP stands for two things: a NetWare protocol and a Standard Accounting Program on which some businesses run their accounting."

A Google search on "Standard Accounting Program" generates nothing of interest, which leads us to believe that the usual suspects out of Walldorf are being misrepresented once again.

But most folks online seem to basically agree on what SAP actually stands for (I'm saving the real answer until the end of this column to trick you into reading the whole thing). However, there are a couple of Web sites that claim SAP actually stands for nothing in English, that it only stands for something in German. This could be true, but it seems that a company started by five ex-IBMers and that eventually conquered America would not have overlooked the American

need to have our acronyms defined in red, white, and blue.

The idea that SAP is up to some secretive things in Walldorf is certainly nothing new. True, it's a lot harder to find German code embedded in SAP than it used to be, but if you dig around the system long enough, you may find some evidence to support a "German conspiracy". Speaking of conspiracies, an old pal (who is also a die-hard SAP recruiter) used to get worked up about a screenplay idea he had based on SAP. In his devilish plot, a foreign company sold its software to all U.S. companies, only to flick some kind of evil switch and wreak havoc. His vision of box office greatness remains a pipe dream, but in this age of heightened security, there are some IT managers reading this with furrowed brows. They are going to think about "SAP as Trojan Horse" scenarios as they try to sleep tonight.

But SAP is not always serious business. The question of what SAP stands for has been a source of humor on many an SAP project. Back in the day, MIT's legendary SAP-R3-L had a very entertaining thread on this subject. List members from across the world blew off their project blueprints long enough to take their best shot. Some of their suggestions are a little dated, but for posterity:

Top Things SAP Stands For

(From a User's Point of View)

Stops All Production!

Select Another Package

Suffering and Pain

Salary Advancement Program

Scare Another Programmer

Slow and Pointless

Say a Prayer

Perhaps they are not so dated after all.

When New Kids on the Block were popular, and later 'N Sync, it was said that "every girl has their favorite." So it goes for SAP - the definition of SAP varies based on the curse words most popular on your project. If you have a good definition that's not on this list, by all means send it to us and we'll run a few of them in a future edition.

In the end, it's a lot more fun to joke about what SAP stands for than to actually define it. But for those who made it this far and really do want to know, your time has come. The Internet is a strange library; the most authoritative definition came not from sap.com, but from the University of Kentucky:

[http://www.uky.edu/IRIS/faq/faqs\\_062905.html](http://www.uky.edu/IRIS/faq/faqs_062905.html)

"What does SAP stand for?"

Answer: The original meaning (which is German) is: "Systeme, Anwendungen und Produkte in der Datenverarbeitung".

When SAP came to America, it changed to Systems, Applications and Products. In the 1980s it was Systems, Applications and Products in Data Processing, a literal translation of the German wording.

So there you have it, straight from Kentucky, the correct answer to the hardest (and easiest) question your SAP project team will ever face.

But there's one more question on my mind. Once this piece is published, will I still get emails asking me "What does SAP stand for?"

Now there's one question I already know the answer to.