

Say What? A Guide to the SAP Terms You Need to Know for ASUG 2008 and Beyond

Say What?

A Guide to the SAP Terms You Need to Know for ASUG 2008 and Beyond

Unabridged Edition, Never Before Released

by Jon Reed

I have a running joke with a friend of mine who insists on pronouncing ABAP "Ayy-Bop," as opposed to the more commonly heard pronunciation "Ahh Bop." He says it's just a case of "you say tom-A-toes, I say "to-mah-toes." I say that how we pronounce terms in the SAP world sends a clear message as to how much we know about the software.

And the more we know, the better the results. When in doubt, I pronounce SAP terms the way CEO Henning Kagermann and the rest of the guys on the board do it. That way, if I'm ever in front of them, I'll hopefully fit right in instead of branding myself as an ill-informed American who doesn't respect the best practices honed night and day in Walldorf. Well, maybe I wouldn't fit right in. But if the opportunity comes up, I don't want to be the one who refers to NetWeaver as "that Fusion-type product."

Think of it this way: if someone calls you on the phone and the first thing they do is call SAP "sap" as opposed to the usual "S-A-P," you would make the assumption that they are new to the world of SAP. And if you're in hurry, which most of us are these days, you'd be more likely to send them to Amazon.com for an "SAP for Newbies" title versus taking your time to bring them up to speed.

As we approach ASUG/Sapphire 2008, we run into the same kinds of dilemmas. Sometimes I have joked that knowing the right SAP terms helps you sound "cool" at SAPPHIRE socials, but mastering SAP terminology is more than just coming off as a first class trade show schmoozer. I submit that it's not a bad thing for job security to become known as "that guy/gal at our company who stays on top of these SAP trends." {mosgoogle}

Knowing your stuff is also a way to get questions answered. At last year's Sapphire, the fact that I knew the difference between PI and XI got me a lot more time and credibility with a couple of SAP product managers. As soon as I managed to somehow use both terms successfully in a sentence, their attitude shifted from "here's another person we have to get up to speed" to "here's someone who can be an SAP evangelist, let's take some extra time to give him an inside scoop."

Of course, the need for a terminology primer is exacerbated by how quickly SAP tries a term on for size and moves on to another - but not after spending sizable chunks of time and money branding product names that are quickly discarded, or, in extreme cases, appropriated by some other SAP product. I have actually seen SAP product representatives misuse SAP terms or use outdated product names. If these folks have trouble keeping up with SAP, what about the rest of us?

But attending a crash course on SAP terminology wouldn't be much fun, no matter how strong the coffee, so instead, Managing Editor Cheryl Cave proposed that I do an easy-to-skim version that you can read on the plane or while you are waiting for tickets at Disney World Orlando.

What follows is a freewheeling SAP terminology guide that you can put to use at ASUG/Sapphire and beyond. Hopefully knowing your way around the SAP vocabulary matrix will help you to get your SAP questions answered. In just a few short minutes, you can become the go-to-person at the water cooler when it comes to what's hip and what's not in SAP.

It does seem like SAP's product name changes can be somewhat arbitrary, but I find that in most cases they are not. So, with each term, I will provide my best answer as to why the term is being phased out or brought in. Note that this represents my take alone and does not represent SAP's views nor that of SAPtips.

SAP Terms You Can Use to Impress

ERP 6.0 - "ERP 6.0" is the name for SAP's latest core ERP release. This is the NetWeaver-driven, service-enabled version of the product that will receive standard maintenance support through 2012. The "ERP 6.0" version name replaces all kinds of other term combinations I will get to during this piece. Why the term change? SAP wanted to get rid of some previous terms that were confusing, and some that were dated by the year (for a little while, ERP 6.0 was called "mySAP ERP 2005"). For a little while, SAP referred to the core ERP component of ERP 6.0 as "ECC 6.0," but SAP now wants to emphasize business-friendly terms over terms that make SAP sound complicated and technical. "ECC" is one of those abbreviations that conjures up images of IT folks with pocket calculators who are needed to translate SAP into terms businesspeople can understand. So, the "ECC" term is still in use, because technically it still represents the enterprise core of ERP 6.0, but it's not a term of emphasis when SAP describes its new solutions.

eSOA - At this point, if you haven't run into the term "Enterprise SOA," or "eSOA" for short, it's time to take a break from go-live and come up for air. In the years to come, we're going to see plenty of the term "eSOA" in the years to come, as SAP has literally staked the success of its product the next five years on the appeal of eSOA. If you want to read more on eSOA, check out my last three CIO Corner columns. For now, we can use the shorthand version and say that SAP's eSOA bet is probably a good one. Across the industry, software vendors of all kinds are racing to become "SOA friendly." The appeal? SOA may be able to offer the same benefits of Enterprise Application Integration (EAI), but without the hassles of custom interfaces. SOA is based on universal (or near-universal) standards, and SAP's eSOA product is no exception. So, this is a term you want to work into your PowerPoints sooner rather than later! Why the term change? Some of you may be wondering where the heck the term Enterprise Services Architecture, or ESA for short, ran off to. For a brief and spastic period, SAP marketed the heck out of "ESA" as their SOA solution. So why the swap to eSOA? I have never heard an official explanation from SAP, but my take is that SAP realized it could not win the branding war against the commonly-used SOA phrase. So, why not piggyback onto the broader marketing of the SOA phrase with the eSOA moniker? It seems to work.

NetWeaver - SAP has put huge resources into the branding of the NetWeaver name. If anything, I would say that NetWeaver is misused by the implication that it's really just one product. I see NetWeaver as an umbrella for a series of inter-related products. The end result? A whole slew of SAP terms that were previously more like stand-alone products are now official prefaced by the NetWeaver term. So, the way to impress your friends with NetWeaver is to be well-versed in all the main products under the NetWeaver umbrella. Just look at all the terminology casualties caused by NetWeaver alone:

NetWeaver Portals (formally Enterprise Portals)

NetWeaver BI, or NetWeaver Business Intelligence (formerly Business Warehouse)

NetWeaver Composition Environment (CE) - new SAP Java-based development environment with a combination of new and old tools within it.

NetWeaver Master Data Management (MDM) - new MDM solution, ships with NetWeaver but as of this writing costs an additional fee to activate.

NetWeaver Application Server (formerly Web Application Server) - not a product SAP emphasizes in marketing as much as the others, this is the engine of the NetWeaver car.

NetWeaver PI, or NetWeaver Process Integration (formally NetWeaver XI or NetWeaver Exchange Infrastructure; this one deserves its own entry).

PI (Process Integration) - PI is the integration hub of SAP's NetWeaver architecture and is also the recommended platform for SAP's eSOA initiatives. For a ridiculously brief period, before it was re-branded as PI, this product was known as the Exchange Infrastructure (XI). PI is a very important part of SAP's technical vision, so SAP was ruthless about naming it appropriately, even if the quick name change caused some customer confusion. Of course, the problem has been compounded by the fact that the "PI" term was already used in the SAP lexicon to refer to "Process Industries."

Often, we saw this come into play as the PP-PI module, or SAP's Production Planning configuration for Process Industries. Perhaps SAP felt comfortable making this change because PP-PI is much more of an SAP R/3 term than an ERP 6.0 term. To the best of my knowledge, PP-PI is still in use, as is the term "SAP for Process Industries," so for now, both usages of the PI moniker are still in use at the same time. At least year's SAPPHIRE, I even met a product manager who had responsibilities in both areas. I asked him about it and all he did was laugh. He stopped laughing before I did.

At this point, when we see the term PI, it usually means NetWeaver PI, unless it has PP in front of it. Why the term change? SAP is trying to position itself as a "Business Process Platform," and as such, SAP wants to be perceived as a business-driven application, rather than an IT-driven product. XI, once again, sounds like something overly technical, something that would require a mechanic to lift up the hood of your ERP system and do things for you. "PI," for "Process Integration," implies a more elegant view of ERP, one that hides the complexity from you and lets you model your own processes and build them right into the SAP system without being at the beck and call of the Information Technology department. {mospagebreak heading=Page 1}

Terms You Should be Careful With

Now that we've covered the hippest SAP terms, we move into trickier territory. This section contains SAP terms you can still use, as long as you are careful about the context. Used properly, folks will know that you are aware of the latest terms, but that you choose to use a different term for accuracy's sake (perhaps because your particular SAP environment is still running these products).

So, here's some terms we can use, but should still be careful with:

Web Application Server - I can't think of a reason offhand why you would need to use this term unless you are deep into the technology, but there are some flavors of NetWeaver that still run on the Web Application Server. Technical team members can certainly use this term for clarity on support and installation issues. One additional reason that SAP has shifted the term Web Application Server to NetWeaver Application Server? Web Application Server was often abbreviated as "WAS," the same abbreviation as IBM's WebSphere Application Server - a situation that caused confusion. Rumor has it that IBM, one of SAP's most important partners, was not too thrilled about SAP's use of WAS either. Change term - problem solved.

BW (or Business Warehouse) - Many SAP shops are still running on a flavor of BW that is actually still called BW. If you're running BW 3.5 or under, you are still definitively on BW, not BI so you can still use the classic "BW" reference. We don't get into the usage of the "BI" term until NetWeaver BI 7.0. Why did SAP change terms? Because they didn't want their product to sound like it was operated by a geek squad out of a warehouse, they wanted to make it sound like the robust business intelligence platform that it truly and finally is. In addition, the industry buzz has shifted away from "data warehousing" and onto the trend of "business intelligence." BW-to-BI allows SAP to capitalize on that branding momentum.

Basis - Basis is a tricky one because we aren't sure if SAP is going to create a new term for "NetWeaver System Admin" or just stick with Basis, as in "NetWeaver Basis." I have seen the phrase "NetWeaver Basis" on some job descriptions, but I haven't seen it used by SAP itself. This one is too early to call, but my bet is on SAP phasing out the Basis term because it is so closely tied to the R/3 systems architecture that is being supplanted by NetWeaver. Of course, many customers are still on older versions of R/3 (typically 4.7 or lower) that are not NetWeaver-driven. These folks can still be using the Basis term freely. But once we get into NetWeaver environments, tossing the term "Basis" around might make you seem a little, well, "old school." You might not get invited to run your company's "Where is SAP headed next?" presentation if you use the term "Basis" too freely. I never liked the term myself, as it has too many connotations from other accounting contexts, so I won't mind seeing it go.

ABAP - Actually, ABAP may be the one term from the R/3 world that remains alive and well. SAP backed off of ABAP a

few years ago and pushed its Java-friendliness, but its customer base, heavily invested in ABAP customizations, was not too thrilled with that approach. These days, ABAP may not get much marketing attention from SAP, but ABAP is still very much a part of SAP's "development platform of the future." True, SAP's next-generation Composition Environment (CE), is exclusively Java-based, but there are many important development tools that are ABAP-based (Web Dynpro for ABAP for one) and many NetWeaver-based processes that are driven at least partially by ABAP code. ABAP is here to stay, but if we use the term too much, it gives the impression that we're not clued into the eSOA-based approach.

The eSOA shift is about not being tied to any one development language, even one as trusty as ABAP. The eSOA vision is really about allowing companies to use the development tools of their choice, or in many cases, using modeling tools to integrate business processes into the technical layer with less hands-on coding than ever before. To be extra cool, when you talk about ABAP, if you can work in some mentions of "Object-Oriented ABAP," or "ABAP Objects," then you will give off the vibe that you understand the overriding importance of re-usable programming techniques in the eSOA era. Just remember, if you use this term, don't pronounce it "Ayyy Bop." Not unless you want to get into a "Tomato/Tomahto" argument with some SAP know-it-all like me.

Terms You Probably Shouldn't be Using

mySAP - Before "NetWeaver" came along, "mySAP" seemed like the term SAP had staked its future on. But now, SAP is dramatically phasing out the "mySAP" term. It is getting harder and harder to find the term "mySAP" anywhere in SAP's solutions literature, which is a bit of a shock given that not long ago, "mySAP" went in front of all of SAP's new ERP releases, as well as before its "Business Suite" products. For a few years after Y2K, SAP plastered the term "mySAP" in front of everything as a way of making clear that SAP was now in tune with Internet trends. But the personalization of the web has gone beyond the "my" prefix into the Web 2.0 arena of blogging and podcasting and trackbacks, and the mySAP term now comes off as dated. I suspect that's why SAP is phasing it out. "mySAP" served a purpose, but you can only brand a few terms in a big time way, and SAP is largely focused on branding ERP 6.0, eSOA, and NetWeaver now. "mySAP" seems like a terminology bandwidth casualty. Think of it as an honorable discharge, and consider discarding it from your SAP vocabulary also.

mySAP ERP 2005 - This term has all kinds of problems with it. Beyond the fading "mySAP" aspect, SAP is trying to drop the year numbers from all its products. It's all about ERP 6.0 now.

ECC 5.0 - ECC 5.0 was the "Enterprise Core Component" of the mySAP ERP 2004 release, another mouthful for the terminology scrap heap, now superseded by the ERP 6.0 release. The only reason to use "ECC 5.0" would be if you were trying to complete an "SAP Crossword Puzzle," or if you were referring specifically to the ECC 5.0 environment or working for a company that is currently running on ECC 5.0. There are more than a few companies are running on ECC 5.0 now, though their numbers are rapidly being eclipsed by those that are either running on, or are moving to, ERP 6.0, which has the ECC 6.0 core.

XI - Pretty much the same deal here as with the ECC 5.0 term. "XI" had a limited shelf life and pretty much only applies when referring to those live SAP customers still running on XI. Otherwise, it's "all PI, all the time."

Service Management - This term can still be used, as long as it's not confused with the newer "CRM Service" or "SAM" (Strategic Asset Management) terms. Many SAP users are still running on the Service Management (SM) product; others partake in the CRM-based version of this product (CRM Service). SAM is an unrelated term but it's just one "A" away from an identify conflict, and I ran into someone who confused the two just last week.

Please Stand at the Back of the Room (If You Use These Outdated Terms)

Usage of these terms may cost you the select seats on the ASUG conference bus. It's wise to retire them unless you have been asked to write a history of SAP.

New Dimensions - I still hear people use this outdated term from time to time. I was never fond of it; I've joked in the past that it sounded more like a New Age cult than a cutting edge product. It's hard to believe that SAP once poured millions into the usage of this term on a broad scale. New Dimensions used to be the term used to describe the immature products that have now become the robust "SAP Business Suite" product line. It's a funny term to drop when you want to remind people of how wacky SAP can be, but I'd save it for those purposes only.

Business Information Warehouse - The Business Information Warehouse, or BIW term, went out of fashion years ago, as SAP made the first of several shifts in the product that pushed it away from affiliation with tech tools and towards a business intelligence platform. The BIW term harks back to a time when the data warehousing market was in its heyday. At that time, SAP was actively seeking credibility from the leaders of the data warehousing movement, such as the father of data warehousing, Bill Inmon, who was one of many who was initially critical of SAP's fledgling BIW product, perceiving it as an affront to the sophistication of true data warehousing. But the last I heard of Inmon, he had worked some stumping for NetWeaver BI into his schedule, so that shows you how much times change, and how well SAP evolves its products.

Conclusion

I hope that the tongue-in-cheek tone of this article did not take anyone back to unwanted memories of high school when people were considered cool or uncool based on what came out of their mouths. At the same time, I also hope that the tone of this piece did not take away from the importance of staying on top of SAP's terminology. I have seen many SAP professionals capitalize on their knowledge of SAP trends. I would go so far as to say that all the exceptional SAP professionals I know make it a point to stay on top of the SAP product line and the terms SAP employs.

Some of these terminology decisions can seem random, but I hope I've shown that despite some missteps, there is a method to SAP's terminology madness. I wish all SAPtips readers the best of luck at the spring conferences, and I hope to see you there. I'll be the one with the little notepad, scribbling down the terms I will use in the next update to this article.

Site Editor's Note: This article was originally published in a modified version in the April/May 2008 edition of SAPtips. SAPtips is a subscription-based publication, but you can obtain a free sample issue from the SAPtips web site, as well as information on all previously published articles.

SAPtips Bio: Jon Reed, JonERP.com. Jon Reed is an independent SAP analyst who writes on SAP consulting trends. He is the President of JonERP.com, an interactive Web site which features Jon's SAP Career Blog and his podcasts for SAP professionals. Jon has been publishing SAP career and market analysis for more than a decade, and he serves as the career expert for SearchSAP.com's "Ask the Expert" panel. From 2003 to 2006, Jon was the Managing Editor of SAPtips.

Jon Reed was recently named an SAP Mentor. The SAP Mentor Initiative is a highly selective program which recognizes those individuals who are making an outstanding contribution to the SAP community. Jon is one of 70 mentors who are playing an active role in SAP's online ecosystem, which includes the combined 1.3 million members of the SDN and BPX web sites.