

Podcast: SAPPHIRE - ASUG 2010 in Review with Andy Klee of ERPTips

"Jon and Andy Interview Each Other on ASUG-SAPPHIRE Orlando 2010, SAP training trends, SAP certification, and other conference takeaways"

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Andy Klee of ERPTips is no stranger to ERP shows. He's a JD Edwards/Oracle industry veteran who has been publishing SAP content for the last seven years and blogging on SAP training trends for the last year. But ASUG-SAPPHIRE Orlando was Andy Klee's first SAP show. So what did he think of SAP culture? Was the food really better than Oracle shows? And what did he learn about training trends from his meetings with SAP customers and SAP Education leaders?

In this thirty-five minute podcast, Jon and Andy have their second two-way conversation (hear the first one here). Andy starts by putting Jon on the JonERP hot seat and getting his conference reactions to SaaS/Business ByDesign, Sybase, and certification, then Jon returns the favor with questions to Andy on his conference takeaways. Jon also surprises Andy with a question about how Oracle/JDE and SAP consultants compare.

Podcast Highlights

:50 Andy is a veteran of evil empire conferences (Oracle, and JD Edwards in particular, and this was his first SAP show.

1:15 Andy puts Jon on the JonERP hot seat with a few questions: what does Jon think of the pending Sybase acquisition? SAP paid a premium for Sybase, 5.8 billion, not cheap. Jon: people were in two camps after the announce - "why?" versus "SAP is back." With any such acquisition, it's all in the execution, we'll see how it plays out. But the Sybase purchase did inject a sense of renewed vigor in the market for SAP. Sybase has been a good partner but do you need them to be a more than a partner? There is some useful Sybase functionality for SAP's in-memory pursuits, related to database column stores for large scale analytics. Then there's the customer base acquisition, and an expanded mobile platform beyond BlackBerry. It's all in the execution: "Ask me in a year."

4:50 Andy to Jon: Mobility as a theme for the conference: for applications, and education may even move to the mobile platform. But most of the show floor mobility vendors were all talking about field service mobility. Why aren't there more SAP mobile offerings from vendors for salespeople?

7:30 Andy to Jon: Software as a Service was a big theme - Business ByDesign, a suite of SaaS apps, is finally ready, but at the same time, SAP executives are also talking about SaaS stand alone apps for large enterprise like expense management that interface with SAP's core products - aimed at customers who wouldn't use ByDesign. Jon: How much of the cutting edge work on ByDesign is coming back to large enterprises? That's the balancing act of pushing ByDesign - you also have to address what that innovation means to an established SAP customer.

10:00 Andy to Jon: Another hot topic - SAP certification. What do you think SAP should do on certification and will they get there?

12:50 Andy: I see disparities between what the Certification Five are saying about certification versus what SAP is saying. Take it to the next level - performance. SAP should do a study on whether consultants who are certified should perform better than those who are not.

16:00 Jon to Andy: Tell us about SAP culture from the outside. Andy: the mood was very upbeat amongst presenters, customers. The food was quite a bit better than the Oracle conference. Andy to Jon: what do you think of the new SAP executive leadership compared to Leo Apotheker?

19:00 Jon to Andy: What are SAP Mentors and bloggers like from the outside? Was it welcoming, or was it more like a club you felt excluded from? Andy: I did feel very welcomed, a lot of people knew my name from the past year's worth of blogging and being on Twitter. People are aware of my Oracle and JD Edwards background and they are always curious about how the environments compare.

21:00 Jon to Andy: What SAP training trends were you picking up on at the conference? Andy: I went to many ASUG sessions, where the emphasis was on sustainability of knowledge and centers of excellence. I met with SAP leadership, Eric MacDonald, global director of SAP Education based out of Paris, Richard Campitelli, North American director, and one of Eric's direct reports, Molly Bazemore. I took away good insight on the future of SAP training and education.

23:00 Jon to Andy: So what will that future be like? Andy: I identified four themes that will impact SAP Education in the next 2-3 years:

1. There's an increasing recognition that implementing SAP is not an IT project, it's a business transformation project, so this guides every aspect of an SAP project, including training. That is going to force all of us to become more aware of the organizational change management issues that happen as a result of implementing SAP.

2. Training itself is changing rapidly. Customers are not budgeting time and money to travel to week long public classes. Every training vendor in the world will tell you that the present economy is forcing a pretty major change in how SAP training is being consumed and offered. Tools like social networking, e-learning, virtual training are all having an impact. It's no small task for a company like SAP to take all their training and re-engineer so that it fits into more bite sized, consumable, more consumer-oriented kind of approach.

3. Sustainability - not in an ecological sense, but rather sustainability of learning. SAP customers are saying: we learned enough about SAP in the beginning to go live, but what happens next? Without a true sustainable learning program in place, users are going to see the value of training decrease. Sustaining learning needs to go beyond go live.

4. Right in line with mobile trends - how training is being consumed - I call it m-learning, or mobile learning - we'll see more and more training opportunities on the mobile platform in the near future.

27:00 Why aren't users investing in training? Andy: it's the reality of economics. Companies need to recognize cost of not training, not easy to deal with when you just don't have the budget. There are no easy answers. What is right amount of IT budget to spend on training - somewhere in the 6-7-8 percent range of total project budget.

31:00 Doesn't continuous learning and using new social tools involve a culture shift? Andy: Yes, I think so, it's starting to happen but it's gradual. I don't see many SAP clients on Twitter, I do see in house experts and consultants but not that many clients.

32:00 Jon to Andy: what's next for your work? Follow up interviews and blogs and full length articles - best practices for end user training and sustaining SAP knowledge post-go-live for executive, project teams and end users. Finally, one really big topic I plan to tackle is: how do I as a customer measure the return on investment on training. I'm hoping to find some customers who will participate in some case studies and put some numbers together.

35:00 What differences do you see between quality SAP and Oracle or JD Edwards consultants? Andy: I don't see a lot of difference, SAP software has richer functionality but consulting skills have to be the same. The good consultants go after the end to end business process, they have to help the client understand what the software can do for them, I see the skill set as very similar: you need outstanding knowledge of what the software can do, but you must also understand the overall business processes. A great consultant typically has got industry experience, they haven't just graduated from college - they have real world business experience.