Podcast: SAP Mobility Buzz Decoder Ring - With John Appleby and Natascha Thomson

"Natascha Thomson grills John Appleby with FAQs about SAP mobility, while Jon Reed plays referree."

Podcast Interview Date: November 23, 2010

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It all started with a blog post. After TechEd 2010, SAP Mentor John Appleby of Bluefin Solutions posted a blog on his take on SAP mobility. Natascha Thomson
of SAP read the blog and some of it didn't make sense to her. It was a clear case of buzzword alert! Seeking clear answers, Natascha and John asked me to referee a discussion between them on "FAQs on SAP Enterprise Mobility."

During this thirty minute podcast, Natascha grills John on SAP Enterprise Mobility. Buzzwords are defined as we dig into everything from the impact of consumer technology to Project Gateway to the implications of HTML 5. Those listeners who make it towards the end of the podcast will be treated to some comic relief as once again a cellular caller (John) drops off a podcast on Enterprise Mobility, proving once and for all that "Always Connected" is a modern myth.

Podcast links: John Appleby has a blog on SCN and also contributes to the Bluefin Solutions blog. Natascha's SCN blog. Other links: Bluefin's Project Santa, Social B2P on Twitter, SAP Mentor Initiative, mobility section on SCN. If you want to subscribe to the series, get the The JonERP Master Blog and Podcast Feed. Or find Jon on his @jonerp Twitter feed. This podcast has been added to the JonERP iTunes podcast feed. This podcast also references the ERP Lounge podcast with John Appleby and Kevin Benedict which digs even deeper into SAP Enterprise Mobility.

Podcast Highlights

:30 "A podcast born out of frustration" - and a desire to better understand SAP mobility and its lingo and buzzwords.

:42 Natascha explains the origins of the podcast. After TechEd, Natascha read a blog about John Appleby's TechEd podcast on SAP mobility and 30 percent of it went over her head. She figured many others might have the same questions - thus the podcast.

1:15 Format of podcast: Natascha is going to grill John Appleby to force him to describe in a coherent manner SAP's mobility strategy and message.

1:55 Natascha to John: Everyone is talking about mobility at the moment, especially at SAP. Why is mobility a big deal in general and with SAP and Sybase in particular. John: the enterprise space is getting its hand forced by the rise of mobility in the consumer space. Consumers are expecting a better user experience and more mobile functionality from

the enterprise: "I can do a ton of things on my iPhone. Why can't I enter my timesheet?" This is where SAP and Sybase comes in. For SAP, to hit their target of a billion users by 2013, they needed to hit the mobile market hard. In emerging markets, cell phones are the devise of choice, rather than desktop computers.

5:00 Natascha to John: What are the basis mobility buzzwords I should understand? John: Understanding the difference between push versus pull, and the difference between platform and enterprise micro-apps. SAP calls their micro-apps "Instant Value Apps." Simple, easy to roll out mobile apps. Often they are tied to workflow and task-specific. They don't tend to require much information on the device. SAP is doing one on expense reporting - purchase order approval is another example of a micro-app. Fully-featured mobile apps require a platform and require a lot of development. CRM could be one example. There could be as many of 100,000 items on the device, and that requires a different set of technologies.

8:25 Natascha to John: How many players are there in this market, who is leading, and where is it headed? John: devices: iPhone, Android and BlackBerry are dominant (with BlackBerry on a slight decline). Nokia and Windows mobile have been in decline, but last month, Windows 7 was issued and that changes the mobile game again. The real question is: will Microsoft impact the enterprise side of the platform? Android is on the rise. On the platform side, Sybase is a big player, but what SAP and Sybase don't really have yet is products. SAPPHIRE 2011 should be a different story. Sybase Unwired Platform (SUP) is a code generation platform, if I write an app on that platform it can be accessed by multiple devices. Then there are smaller players that have industry-specific solutions.

12:30 Natascha to John: When I think of this from a marketing perspective, what does this mean for end users? John: Mass marketing doesn't work anymore. Targeted mailings and personalized reachouts are becoming the norm. Marketing is becoming a conversation, and that's certainly extending to mobile devices. Mobility can help to allow you to continually participate in conversations. Mobility becomes an extension of the desktop, but it's more than that: it's a replacement of the desktop. The next generation of devices will be always-online like the iPad. As a result there will be no concept of the desktop, it will be what you are carrying around with you. Jon Reed: The mobile device extensions changes the marketing game further.

There is a record low tolerance for mass email campaigns on mobile devices. The challenge to marketers is: don't just press "send" anymore. Think about who you are sending it to and why. John: the next generation of mobile devices will take it even further to help you define and receive only the information that is relevant to you right now. The system will do its own analytics to help prioritize your mailbox and what you need to see. Natascha: At SAP, it's changing from B to B to B to P (business to people), and that means engaging on a more personal level. We have a Twitter account called social B2P if you want to check that out.

18:00 Jon Reed to John: It might be remiss not to bring up Gateway...what does it mean for mobile? John: Gateway is one of those terribly interesting products with a lot of hype around it. This is a product that isn't generally available yet. Gateway is geared towards lightweight devices. SAP's goal is to have a lot to show with Gateway by SAPPHIRE 2011. The use for Gateway will be for the Instant Value apps we discussed earlier. The current Instant Value apps are not written in Gateway, but they will be in the future. At Bluefin, we'll be using restful services and HTML for online/offline access to our mobile time and expenses app (it's called Project Santa). For BPM and for Gateway, you can go all the way back to 4.6C. Not every organization wants to be on the latest ERP platform, but they need to have access to these mobile technologies.

21:50 Comic relief segment: John Appleby drops off the call on his Windows mobile phone, comic relief ensues until John rejoins.

24:05 Jon Reed to John: Why does HTML 5 matter to mobile? John: I'm passionate about HTML5 and its possibilities for mobile. HTML5 is a new standard for producing rich content on web browsers or mobile devices. With HTML5, you can get this rich content without Flash or Silverlight. In theory, HTML5 will do all this with a standard browser, though Internet Explorer has poor HTML5 support unless you're on IE9. But on mobile devices, HTML5 with Gateway you can do really interesting things and really quickly. You can create a database using a web page - if I want to download something pertaining to workflow approval, I can download that locally and make it available on and offline. The "always connected" thing is never going to be the case. I may eat my words there, but cellular communications always go up and down. It will improve, but we'll always be online and offline, and that's what HTML5 recognizes this, and lets you do it on any compliant device.

28:10 Last words: for those who want more detail, dig into the Appleby-Benedict-Jon Reed podcast on Enterprise Mobility....