

SolBros Episode #5 - 2011 SAP Solution Manager Kick-off Talk

"January 2011 kickoff - SAP Solution Manager shop talk, myths/realities, and a few wisecracks"

Podcast Interview Date: January 31, 2011

{enclose pcast_jonerp_solbros5.mp3}

[PC users: "right click" to download file]

The "Sol Bros" are: Jim Spath, Tony de Thomasis, Phil Avelar and Jon Reed.

Previous "Sol Bros" podcasts: Episode 1, Episode 2 , Episode 3, Episode 4.

Music: For this Friday night taping (except for Tony who was already on Saturday morning), Jon selected a live Friday night jam: "Runnin" from Massachusetts' own Longview Gunslingers.

Podcast links: SAP Press SolMan System Monitoring, Solution Manager Service Desk - Change Management Integration by Tammy Powlas, SAUG Summit 2011, SAP Service Marketplace SolMan Info (log-in required), ASUG Annual Conference (Orlando)

Podcast Structure: I. Intro chatter, II. (2:40) SolBros reader questions, III. (21:55) SolMan - "A mile wide and an inch deep?" - discuss! IV. (36:05) Individual updates: Jim Spath - SolMan and ASUG, Phil Avelar - CHARM lessons learned, Tony D - SolMan consulting, customer value and learning tools.

For detailed podcast notes and one-liners, click on "read more." This podcast has been added to the JonERP iTunes podcast feed.

I. Intro banter - what have the guys been up to? 1:05 Jim Spath update: deep into integration projects after corporate merger in March of 2010 - busy! Phil: CHARM services projects - and the holidays... Tony: sharing "Solution Manager excellence" across Australia...

II. 2:40 Reader Questions

Tony: Every company should have a release strategy that they should agree on - breaking a year into quarters to apply maintenance across a landscape and minimize disruption. Being pro-active tends to work better than waiting till an OSS note problem hits you.

Jim: I see this question as similar to questions of the timing of patching core systems like routers or network switches. Any kind of control system that you depend on for the rest of your environment, you have to approach very gingerly, and patch it off cycle from the rest of your landscape.

Phil: When it comes to the production box, a quarterly schedule for Solution Manager updates would be ideal, but I find most companies aren't able to make that happen and a yearly update schedule might be more realistic for them.

(Discussion of pros and cons of Solution Manager patch scheduling versus other landscape management priorities).

Tony: Patching Solution Manager is never done in isolation, so if you patch Solution Manager frequently, you'll have to patch your satellite systems more frequently as well. A decent testing strategy with proper tools and documentation is essential. Phil: ASUG has valuable content when it comes to planning upgrades and patches and managing release schedules. Jon: "Isn't the bottom line that support packs are kind of a pain in the *ss? I talk to customers that have trouble getting them in once a year." Tony: "If you're not on top of support packs by now, when are you going to get on top of it? We've been used to applying support packs since the R/2 days...Welcome to IT, guys - this is what we live and breath." Phil: It's the testing that's the challenge - sometimes you don't have the manpower. I have customers who haven't applied support packs since they went to ECC. Jim: getting permission to make patches and changes is non-trivial but it needs to be done...Let's go on to the next question.

15:15 Reader question emailed to Jim Spath (loong question).

Jim: question was inspired by a wiki page I put up to get Central Performance History running which has not been completed yet. The question is almost identical to the snag I ran into where the BI portion of the CPH looks like it was set up, but it isn't really functional. I thought it was indicative of the complexity and the layering of products like SolMan as they have evolved. Problems can be difficult to resolve with so many layers in the mix. Post it was a a reply on the wiki or the blog so that it isn't just me trying to solve it. Or, open a ticket with SAP. Tony: if he's a BI guy, generally these things can be fixed by running the SolMan setup again. Or looks through the RSA1 logs in SolMan. Search SCN forums. Check the SAP Press books on SolMan also a "TDT approved method." Jim: By talking about this I often get questions directed to me - restate them and put them in a public forum so the next person can find it also. Warning: "AskJim.com", Tony's suggested site for SolMan questions, doesn't really exist.

21:55 "Solution Manager is a mile wide but an inch deep". Debate and discuss!

Tony: If you want to get famous, say something controversial about Solution Manager. Reality: If you want to get something out of SolMan, you have to invest something into it. It's not easy, but nothing is. SolMan is loaded, but it has to be configured. ABAP stack, Java stack, BI stack- there's so much in there. But SolMan must be funded, so there must be a C-level ROI message to show that a little investment in SolMan will pay off down the road. It will show you outages,

and give you baseline reports - unless you have a mechanism to measure how your system is running, you're flying blind. You can monitor BI. Portals, Central Performance History, then you have sophisticated end user experience management, business process management and root cause analysis. But you need funding and a good SolMan person. Approach it in bit size chunks and build momentum. Eventually with that momentum, you can move on to business process monitoring and snappy testing and business process change analysis tools - big ticket items you can work towards if you can unlock the small ones and build momentum.

Jim: I see the "not very deep but very wide" comment as referring to the attempt to put so many features in SolMan that it can limit the ability to deliver on any of them. From what I've heard in the user community, there's a spectrum of adoption of Solution Manager. Some companies go with the bare minimum of what SAP has mandated and some have even managed to ignore the mandates. Some in the middle have adopted one or two of the features. And there are a few who have adopted more than several SolMan components, but it takes big investments and big teams a lot of work to do that - it's not a trivial exercise.

Phil: I had this same conversation recently with a group of colleagues...the biggest problem is one of packaging. I think if SAP packaged this separately and talked about CHARM or monitoring, the reality is that it's too much, these aren't best in class tools but they are free. The monitoring tools are excellent, CHARM is pretty good, the support desk is pretty good - are they best in class? In the CHARM areas, it's not. If SAP packaged these features separately, it might be more effective. Some customers just aren't going to implement an SAP-centric solution, they have other things they have to deal with.

Tony: SolMan is the only tool that combines all these tools in one ALM offering. Other vendors offer these tools separately. If you want heavy duty best of breed plug ins, you have to buy them. It's not free, these tools, these are all chargeable items. With SolMan, it's part of Enterprise Support, and there's a number of open APIs, if you don't like the current offering, you can plug your choice of tools in there. You can pull the tools into the SolMan shell - whether that's good or not depends on how much money you're willing to put into it, and how third party tools are impacted by upgrades to SAP ERP systems. SAP will improve change management, testing and root cause analysis. SolMan 7.1 is loaded with a bunch of new features, the UI has been redone, change management has been improved, testing has been more integrated with change management.

32:55 Jim renames Solution Manager: It's now called "Solution ByDemand" by SAP. Tony: We tried SolMan on-demand for a customer. You have to have some serious bandwidth to do it properly. We gave it a crack but there are some obstacles.

34:35 Jon: "Is someone vacuuming?" Jon: SAP does need to hear the criticism, but it needs to be sharpened. Something like SolMan is a "mile wide and inch deep" doesn't give SAP much to work with. To be more precise, you can talk about how it's not competitive with best of breed, or customers being forced into adoption, or the expense of getting the most out of it.

36:05: What our guys have been up to with SolMan since the last podcast:

Jim: I was in Chicago the last weekend in cold temperatures for the ASUG annual conference planning meeting with well over 200 volunteers...We went through hundreds and hundreds of SolMan abstracts....I'm not in the SolMan ASUG group but I can check on that pool: There were over 60 abstracts in the SolMan category itself - while that's not a large percentage of the total, that's a big number of customers, partners, SAP that have something that they want to talk about and show with SolMan. The number of sessions we'll have at the May conference (same time as SAPPHIRE) is

somewhere around 15. Speaker acceptance emails going out now. I can't reveal what's on the schedule till people commit, but there are a couple SAP SolMan speakers who will be there, talking about 7.1. The original schedule for the ramp up would have already been started, I've heard there may be some delays on that, it may not be ready for GA by May, but there will be some lessons from what the customer who are testing it have seen. I expect to see about a dozen customers and partners talking about it. Some well known names in industries like health care and electronics and not just in the monitoring suite, there's CHARM, customer development cleanup (a perennial concern of anyone doing an upgrade or trying to weed out bad code), change control business process, they are going to cover everything. There will be roundtables as well with partners and customers presenting.

(Jim checks on how the numbers of sessions compare with past years while we continue to talk).

40:55 Phil's update: last 3-4 months I've been buried in some CHARM initiatives as a packages service and working with customers, but we've had some takeaways: there are so many different ways of doing change management, as many ways as there are customers. The intent of CHARM for us is to show people the process and walk away. But a lot of companies have checks and balances they've put in over the years, and they don't know why they are there, but they are there. What we don't want to make a bad process a lot faster. Take a look at the change management process first, ask the questions upfront - before you trying automating it, and make sure the steps you are doing are the ones you should be doing in a new environment..We've run into some very sophisticated ways people have used CTS in the ERP system in the same way they get out of CHARM now. I encourage everyone to take a look at CHARM, but the takeaway I've learned is to go back and attack your process first and make sure that's in line before you install CHARM.

Jim to Phil: Are you facing scope creep, poorly defined scope with new requests coming in? Phil: A lot of it is a lack of understanding of why the processes are in place. But in both projects, as we moved along and started socializing what the processes were going to look at, the processes changed a bit. It wasn't scope creep because change management was part of the scope, but things did evolve - there were exceptions that should have been eliminated. And you don't want to automate bad processes. We wanted to come out with a standard template so we could leverage the CHARM process from one client to another. Making a change is pretty quick, its' the meetings to streamline the process that are important prior to the changes.

47:20 Tony's update on his SolMan consulting business: We've had a number of direct hits for SolMan touchups, one or two day engagements to show the client how to bite off small pieces of functionality and move towards an ROI. What we get a lot of interest in is setting up the baseline reports, the business process analysis reports. Transport execution analysis, security optimization service reports - we deploy five or six reports in around a day or a day and a half, that allows customers to baseline themselves, and once they have some funding or buy-in we can enable additional functionality a piece at a time and measure the benefits. One thing we can do it track how fast the database is growing and how a "rubbish removal" or data archiving strategy might be employed, or database compression. Once we deploy the compressions, we can show you how many terabytes you have saved and see the positive return from a technical activity. Most customers are in the same boat, they want to be convinced that there is a positive ROI, but you need to listen to the pain points and deploy the right resolution based on what's going on in their world.

Tony's SolMan education shout outs: There are some Expert Guided Implementation sessions on CHARM, including a five day CHARM course. I'm so impressed that I've asked to run one on behalf of SAP on behalf of SAP for Australian customers - an intro on ALM for those who are interested. That should come out in next 12 months. Tammy Powlas ha written at least five fantastic articles on the service desk and CHARM on SCN, we'll include a link in the notes to that. We're using those as reference materials because they are so good. There are also three SAP Press books to look at, one I mentioned earlier is for CPH, the other two are for CHARM and the last one is for the Service Desk. Generally when you implement CHARM you have to implement the Service Desk first. The last one is for the SAP Australia user Group have a session in August that will include, with any luck, some key players from SAP to drive the technology track,

and some of the topics that will be covered will be the upgrade, and in particular, how to use the custom development management cockpit. Getting the most out of EhPs, and testing and change management will be covered as well. Can I close on advising everybody to get cracking on their Oracle upgrade? Get off 10.2 and get on 11.2 before June 30 or pay more maintenance.

54:45 Podcast wrap: upcoming events. Jim: as many as 17 sessions just on SolMan on that track this year in May at ASUG Annual Conference. In 2010 there were 13, in 2009 there were 10, in 2008 there were none, probably a few presentations but no special interest group. Jim: will be at Mastering SAP Australia but I won't be talking SolMan, I'll be talking about patching and the change control cycle and hardware uptime. That will be my first trip down under.

Jon: name changes: BusinessObjects name conventions....Sybase acronyms....30 new acronyms....it's "Beer thirty."
"Why don't kids like Solution Manager? Friday night wrap."