

Kimball Electronics Saves Time with SDN

Applies to:

Business Server Pages (BSP), Proxies, and SAP NetWeaver 2004s

Summary

Kimball Electronics Group is a leading technology company providing design, engineering, manufacturing, packaging, and distribution of electronic assemblies, and circuit boards on a contract basis to a variety of industries on a global scale. Kimball Electronics Group is part of Kimball International Inc.

For Kimball, supplier development, high quality and reduced costs are some of its customers' primary concerns. By measuring suppliers' performance in the three key areas of quality, delivery and service, Kimball is able to help its customers remain competitive in the world market.

Chris Cassidy, Applications Team Lead for Kimball Electronics Group, discussed how collaboration on SDN helped him resolve complex network issues with SDN contract writer Catherine LaCroix.

Author: Catherine LaCroix

Company: SAP

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LaCroix: What was the challenge or “pain point” that motivated you to use SDN?

Cassidy: We were challenged to expose an application to our customers. It's an application we were using internally and wanted to expose to our customers through our firewall. It's a BSP (business server pages) application that runs on the Web application server. We have a complicated ecosystem with several touch points in the whole process, so this was new territory for everyone involved. My primary focus was on the application side of the BSP application, and how it interfaces to our SAP system to summarize and display the data and charts.

I had read several articles in SAP Help on some of this configuration, but couldn't find exactly what I needed. I then went to SDN. I use SDN frequently—daily, in fact. I dug up an article on BSP proxies that Brian McKellar had written and published on the Wiki. It discussed different types of landscapes and how to do this type of configuration.

LaCroix: What would you have done if you hadn't found this article? What would have been your strategy for finding the solution?

Cassidy: If it didn't exist on SDN, I may have eventually stumbled upon these same test programs, but I don't know that I would have understood that the host headers needed to match, which was key to all this. The McKellar article explained that. So I probably would have tried a forum post on SDN explaining the problem. That would have been the next course of action.

LaCroix: Approximately how much time had you spent trying to find the solution?

Cassidy: Anywhere from two to four days, maybe even about week overall.

LaCroix: Why is saving time so critical for you?

Cassidy: We're a contract electronics manufacturer, so it's very important for us to do things efficiently.

LaCroix: Is SDN helping with some of these challenges?

Cassidy: Yes. Coming from an IT perspective, and being a developer, I find that sometimes when problems hit you, you just don't know how long it's going to take to figure things out. This BSP issue was probably one of the most involved problems, just due to the complexity of all the pieces. We had to comply with our security standards and protect everything going in and out of the firewall. So there were a lot of touch points in this situation.

LaCroix: Prior to finding the solution, what else did you look at?

Cassidy: Primarily, I used the SAP Help. It's very good, but there's a difference between online help and actually communicating with someone who has experienced the same problem, warning or error message that you have gotten. There's so much value in that.

LaCroix: What part of SDN do you find yourself in most often?

Cassidy: The blogs and Wiki.

LaCroix: What were you trying to achieve through membership to SDN?

Cassidy: We were trying to network with other developers who were using the same SAP tools. We wanted to find out what they have learned from their experiences, as well as get specific examples of how they were using the tools on their SAP NetWeaver configurations.

LaCroix: Can you provide a specific example(s) of a project that you used SDN to accelerate or improve?

Cassidy: Just yesterday, we had an issue with some characters in a character set on one of the applications we developed. This application was causing some issues on our Unicode upgrade. We got stuck for about three or four hours. We were able to find an article on SDN that talked about a MIME setting to use for text and coding. We incorporated that information and it fixed our issue.

LaCroix: How does collaboration with other experts on SDN/BPX help you in your daily work?

Cassidy: When someone else has run into the same problems and has resolved it, that knowledge means we don't have to spend two or three hours spinning our wheels to figure out the same solution.

LaCroix: What is the overall benefit of SDN to your business?

Cassidy: It's a huge time-saver. It saves you time in terms of using SAP technology by providing programming examples, as well as excellent documentation, and how-to guides.

LaCroix: How much time does SDN save you week to week?

Cassidy: Maybe an average of one hour per week. It really takes just one tough problem to consume a lot of time and a lot of people. Being able to resolve problems [on SDN] can be a significant advantage.

LaCroix: What do you learn or gain from participation in the communities?

Cassidy: I've learned a lot more about how to use the tools. In particular, I've learned how to use them correctly and develop them to provide better applications for our customers.

LaCroix: What value did SDN ultimately create for your customers? What is the differentiator with SDN over other communities?

Cassidy: Having a place to go where you can find solutions is a key differentiator. SDN allows us to present our data in a manner that can be used easily by our end users -- not just internally, but externally. We now have several applications lined up to do similar things with the same infrastructure. We'll be able to leverage everything we put into place for subsequent BSP applications.

LaCroix: How does SDN impact your partner relationships, or pave the way for new relationships?

Cassidy: We're able to add value for partners by giving them richer tools. That's the benefit.

LaCroix: What are your next steps with SDN?

Cassidy: We eventually want to get to the SAP NetWeaver 2004s platform. I think getting to that point and using Web Dynpro will be the next logical step in our growth process. I could see SDN being a big help there. Another area we're working on is our client relations with our partners, suppliers, and vendors in terms of EDI. Who knows what will happen there? We could be doing some research or collaboration on SDN in that regard.

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