

SDN Helps Customers Maximize the Value of SAP Solutions

Summary

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Dan McWeeney, winner of the SAP TechEd '06 Demo Jam, says SDN has broadened his knowledge of both SAP and non-SAP technologies, making him a go-to guy for technology solutions at Colgate-Palmolive, where he's a programmer analyst.

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SB: How do you use SAP products and technology in your work at Colgate-Palmolive?

DM: I use SAP software to achieve business objectives. I am a Business Analyst at Colgate, which means that I work in tandem with all of our business areas to develop customized technology solutions to support their objectives. I have used SAP software to meet Colgate's particular needs in a number of areas, including supply chain management, demand chain management, and in our finance department.

SB: How does SDN add value to, or facilitate, the work that you do?

DM: SDN is an amazing repository of knowledge. I can usually find obscure information just by doing a quick search. And when I don't find the answer in an existing blog or forum post I can post a question or directly e-mail some of the best SDN-ers I know.

SDN has broadened my knowledge of SAP and non-SAP technology, which allows me to identify the best technology solution for a problem.

SB: Describe your history with SDN. How long have you been a member? In what ways do you participate in the community?

DM: I signed up for SDN in September of 2003 and initially used it as a source of information. At the time, SDN was principally an online tool for SAP users to ask how-to questions so while I followed some of the forum topics being discussed, I did not become an active member until I began blogging about some "new" technologies like AJAX and open source. From the responses I quickly realized that these topics were pretty controversial in the SAP world but also something of interest to a large number of users. So, I continued to talk about topics that interested me and tried to push the discussion away from just 'how-to' questions towards 'what-ifs.'

SB: Your manager at Colgate-Palmolive encourages your continued involvement in the SDN community and is supportive in allowing you and your colleagues to share information on SDN, for example open source developments. From your perspective, what is the business value of having developers and analysts engage in online communities like SDN? Do you have any best practices for this type of engagement?

DM: One of the principal values of open source projects is the ability to collect and absorb knowledge.

One of my first open source developments at Colgate-Palmolive was a solution to a common problem faced by people with BW systems the inability to print a web report. We developed a piece of code that allows large HTML tables to be printed directly from IE, allowing fit-to-pages and tiling functions just like normal spreadsheet applications. We had written two versions internally and didn't have the time or inclination to do anymore development so we released the code to the SDN community in hopes of getting others to work on it or make it faster. I don't think anyone in the community is updating the system yet, but they have downloaded it over 600 times.

Colgate-Palmolive became involved early on in SDN when Steve Renard and Jay Brown submitted an article about some portal code they had written. The management at Colgate-Palmolive had actually urged them to submit content and that level of support continues today.

I think Colgate has realized that the more their analysts know about SAP and about adjacent technologies the better their in-house solutions will be.

I think best practices for working with SDN is a pretty simple programming analogy: GIGO (Garbage In, Garbage Out). The community thrives on incoming knowledge and will reward new interesting knowledge with ideas of their own; to be creative and to be innovative is to be social and to discuss. SDN really helps individuals and companies to do this on a massive scale and it's totally free.



Dan McWeeney plays to the crowd at the SAP TechEd '06 Demo Jam in Las Vegas

SB: Tell me about the applications you showed at the SAP TechEd events in Las Vegas and Amsterdam.

DM: One of the applications I demoed at TechEd was a Ruby on Rails (RoR) system developed to help Colgate allocate people to projects. Colgate is an enormous corporation and it can be difficult process to allocate resources to projects. We had used a number of different ways of doing this, spreadsheets, standalone project management tools, etc., but they were all frustrating to use or didn't connect to SAP. So we built a "drag-and-drop" planning tool that looks similar to a Gantt chart. Our manager can drag and drop people onto a project then manipulate a set of sliders to indicate how long the person needs to work on it. The application runs entirely in a Web browser and keeps BW data up to date with what they are doing in the planning system.

SAPlink, the other demo I presented at TechEd, is an open source project that aims to make it easier to share ABAP developments between programmers. It provides the ability to easily distribute and package custom objects. What this means is that developers from different companies can share their ABAP developments with each other very easily. Before SAPlink for two people to share a bit of code on SDN someone would have to make highly detailed instructions with snippets of source code to copy and where to type it in. Someone who wanted to use this code now had to go onto their system and hand type the entire thing back in. This took hours for person publishing the code sample and hours of tedious typing for the person trying to use the sample. With SAPlink, this whole thing can be done in minutes with a few clicks of the mouse for both the person creating the code and the person using the code. [Editor's Note: Find the SAPlink project at: <http://code.google.com/p/saplink/>]

SB: How would you sum up the experience of presenting, and winning, the SAP TechEd Demo Jam?

DM: The Demo Jam was one of the best experiences of my professional career. I don't know when else I would get to present to 2,000 + people, twice in one year. I run a lot of training sessions at my company but don't normally do six-minute demos, so the challenge was fairly unique. I would suggest that everyone try to apply [to participate in the SAP TechEd demo jam] – it's a great experience and gives great visibility to you and your company.

The most amazing thing for me was the community response. I have been reading the "Best of SDN" thread and to see so many people saying SAPlink was one of the best things of 2006 is pretty surprising. However, probably the single greatest compliment I received was after Rich Heilman (ABAP Forum Master) looked at SAPlink for a few minutes and remarked, "This is really well designed."

Related Links:

[SAPlink Project](#)

[SAP's SDN helps one techie come into spotlight](#) – SearchSAP

[SAP Developer Network](#)

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