Podcast Transcript:
SAP Mobility Trends - An SAP Community Podcast with SAP Mentors Benedict and Appleby Hosted by Jon Reed of JonERP.com
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Jon Reed: Welcome to this SCN Community podcast. I'm your host, Jon Reed of JonERP.com. Joining me today is Kevin Benedict of Net Sensing Strategies and John Appleby of Bluefin Solutions. We're here to talk about SAP mobility trends and how these two SAP Mentors are using the mobility resources on SCN in their own work. I also hope to pick up a few blogging tips from a couple of SCN veterans.

Given that SAP set the tone at SAPPHIRENOW and that this is the year of the mobile enterprise, I'm glad to have these guys on the call to help us understand mobile trends in the SAP community. I want to learn a little more about you guys and how you became active in the SAP community in the mobility space. Kevin, let's start with you.

Kevin Benedict: I started in mobility back in 2000 when I was working for an Irish company called IONA Technologies that was developing mobile middleware for enterprises. They're a long-term enterprise middleware company that extended out to laptops back then. Since then, I started being in product evangelism, product marketing, and product development in mobile middleware.

But back in about 2004, I became the CEO of a mobile applications company primarily for field services operations. I did my tenure there and gained a great deal of experience. Back in 2008, I jumped into the world in the SAP Ecosystem, became an active blogger on SDN on enterprise mobility, and last year was top contributor on mobile platforms on the SDN community.

Reed: And what about you, John?

John Appleby: My side comes from the SAP technology side. I run a technology and business unit for SI in the UK; we cover a wide range of topics. It was really clear when SAP set out its co-innovation strategy last year that mobile was really going to come of age for SAP. That was so clear to me that we put in quite a lot of effort to figure out exactly what this meant for the market, what were the products being generated by RIM and Sybase and Syclo. That led to SDN involvement because it was the only place to go for information.

Reed: One thing I have learned about SAP mobility is that there is a big difference between mobile point solutions and an enterprise mobility strategy. Kevin, can you take a shot at that and tell us what the difference is?

Benedict: There's a lot of different kinds of mobile applications people are talking about within the SAP Ecosystem. There are browser-based applications that are mobile. There are what's called micro-apps, which are often seen in the iPhone and BlackBerry environments. These are lightweight apps that you can just download from online app stores. They do some important and

very interesting things, but they're lightweight in that they don't carry a lot of content, they don't store data on the devices, they don't do a lot of computation on the devices, but they give you access into SAP.

An example would be alerts. Let's say a supplier sent an invoice that needs to be approved. An alert can be sent out to an iPhone from SAP. A manager can look at that and approve the invoice, that approval gets sent back in, and the accounts payable process can continue from there. It's a very important mobile app, but it's very lightweight, doesn't do a whole lot. The value is that when somebody's on the road, you're not stopping a business process from being executed internally. There are a lot of ROIs; they're lightweight; those are inexpensive applications.

As a matter fact, one of the vendors in SAP Ecosystem I think announced 40 new ones at SAPPHIRE this year. You can build a lot of those little ones.

Mobile browser applications are very interesting in that you can build one application that can fit on many different kinds of mobile operating systems through their browsers. The disadvantage of those kinds of applications? They don't take advantage of the native environment on the iPhone, BlackBerry or Android. They're just a browser base; you're not taking advantage of the operating system or the mobile device itself.

Another category is rich clients or what's called thick clients, which are often very powerful applications. They frequently contain databases on the mobile device, so all your customer data can be on there. You can look up all kinds of information, whether you're connected to the internet or on a train somewhere with a poor connection. You always have access to your information.

Those are the different categories you see out there. And then you see the word MEAP come up a lot: Mobile Enterprise Application Platform. That's a big word for a whole series of components that can make up a MEAP. You'll have mobile middleware, development tools, GUI interface development tools, security, and sometimes different levels of mobile device management. Those are the different categories you're seeing out there.

One way of looking at point solutions specifically is if you're building a field service app as a vendor, maybe you're only providing a mobile application just to your own field service app. So maybe you're a field service back-end applications company; you've now created a mobile version of that. But you're not trying to accomplish everything an enterprise needs. You're not trying to do their asset management, you're not trying to do inspections, or sales force automation. You're just doing field service. So that would be an example of just a point solution, Jon.

Reed: Now John, I want to ask you about your work. Are you seeing companies leaning more toward the specific point solutions or are they starting to grapple with a broader enterprise mobility strategy that makes sense in the bigger picture.

Appleby: I'm coming to this from the opposite end of the spectrum as Kevin has just done. What we've seen a lot of in the last five years is big point solutions. So asset management is a great

example, or field service. These scenarios where you might have thousands of workers who go and do field service (repair pumps or electricity stations or gas meters, for example), where there are massive efficiencies to be had by doing combination scheduling, mobile scheduling, and updating these things on the move. That's where the big ROI was for mobile investments.

These are point solutions, and these things exist already typically; a lot of organizations have them already. But there's been a paradigm shift where people have their iPhones and Androids and BlackBerries at home and these micro-apps that Kevin talked about, and they're thinking, "Well, would I have one of these for my timesheets? Why not?"

We're seeing a shift toward people who have implemented one or two point solutions, but in some instances they've implemented 10 or 20 point solutions. They realize they've got a whole mobile road map that they need to do over the next few years, and they're looking to implement a platform to build upon that.

Reed: Both of you have been active on the community network in mobility space. John, what are you taking from the time you're spending there?

Appleby: The first experiences we had were implementing the Sybase platform. We were really the first people in the world to be doing that. But, before us the people doing the RIM CRM clients have been there on the NetWeaver Mobile platform. What I was able to specifically do is draw from the experiences of the RIM guys, in terms of the problems they had, and apply that to the Sybase platform. What's more, there are a couple of key SAP developers who blog and are active on the forums, who wrote the product and are there to help.

Reed: Kevin, from your vantage point, what resources are folks taking advantage of? What are you taking from mobility discussions on SCN?

Benedict: From a business perspective, I'm a mobile industry analyst and a consultant. Being active since 2008 on issues around enterprise mobility - which in some ways was before it was popular - in a way created an audience for enterprise mobility that has generated a lot of business for me personally. A lot of the work I'm doing I'm able to share as experiences and how-to articles, and that creates a lot of conversation with the SAP community.

Last year I was SAP's top contributor for mobility. This year, they invited me to be an SAP Mentor focused on enterprise mobility. That is the result of being active within the community on SDN and blogging regularly.

Reed: I'm glad you brought up this aspect of blogging and the conversations because a lot of people, I think, still think of blogging as a one-way outlet. What I notice, especially on SCN, is all the conversations that spring up as a result of the blogs. Kevin, have you seen that in your blogging work?

Benedict: Yes. Even this year at SAPPHIRE, a lot of the mentors were given these little flip video cameras to go around and interview various people we saw on the floor in the exhibition hall at SAPPHIRE. It made it very easy because people recognized me when I would come up

and shake their hand and say, "I'm Kevin Benedict." The feedback was often that they've read my blog articles on SDN. They were familiar with me, so they were willing to do an interview.

Blogging opens a lot of doors because people are familiar with you. They've been sharing ideas back and forth online and when you meet them face-to-face it's not a cold introduction. They feel like they know you already.

Reed: John, what kinds of conversations have you gotten into? Anything interesting come out of them?

Appleby: Well, it was exactly the same experience for me in Orlando with Kevin: when people aren't running away from you, they're pretty pleased to come and talk. No, I'm just joking. That recognition as a mentor, and the kind of input that we've given to SCN as a precursor to becoming a mentor, means that people are really up for talking to you. They choose their words carefully when you interview them with the flip cam, and they know it's going to hit YouTube on the mentor channel, which has been great.

Reed: I think our listeners might be surprised to learn that most experienced bloggers on SCN had to be initially encouraged and brought out of their shells by someone. I want to ask you how you got started. Did you have a blogging mentor, so to speak, that pushed you into active blogging? What advice would you have for those who are early in their efforts and maybe looking for a little inspiration to get going?

Benedict: I started blogging on my own back in 2006 on issues related to enterprise mobility. Personally, I was warmed up to the experience because I had written several hundred blog articles. Let me just touch on that number of "several hundred." People think blogging is difficult, but it doesn't have to be more than a couple paragraphs, maybe two to five, of an experience, a discussion, or an observation that you've had in the mobility industry. It's not Shakespeare.

This can be something like: I got off a phone call today, a company had these kinds of problems which caused these kinds of issues internally, they're looking for a mobile solution, and they're looking for these kinds of ROIs. Just a generic discussion like that is important information for the community to know. People will hear that and say, "That's me, too. I have those same kinds of issues. I have those same kinds of problems. I would like those same kinds of results."

It's that kind of information that you hear on the phone every day or in discussions with somebody that really make good blog articles. It doesn't have to be big; it can just be personal experiences from the day on the phone.

Many times with companies I've worked with, the company would decide they want a corporate blog. They would assign eight different people to publish articles to that blog. No one would write. Because their expectations of what they need to write are so huge, they think it would take them weeks to generate one article. It really doesn't have to be that. It's sharing with the community the knowledge you've gained today from discussions you had. It's a lot easier once people realize what's interesting material to read.

Reed: Good stuff, Kevin. Makes me want to blog. And John, did someone trick or cajole you into blogging, or was it something that you found on our own?

Appleby: We hear the story that it's always Marilyn Pratt who is involved, and this wasn't the case for me. Where it came from for me: Bluefin is an organization that has a really knowledge management-centric culture. We think that sharing is caring. So quite early on I found that writing about my experiences around difficult situations and technical problems was very cathartic.

It almost puts these problems to rest when you resolve the problem on a customer system, write about it, and describe what you did. It's documented forever and people can reference it and I use it as my long-term memory, if you like.

What I realized one day was that I'd written all this content, and really it was content that would be interesting to a wider community, but I'd considered it to be IP. What I came to realize is that IP is not really all that important; the collective knowledge is much more important. I woke up one Sunday morning at 10 a.m. and just decided to write my first blog on SCN. That was the most popular one I ever wrote, I think, and that's what I've continued to do.

Repurposing existing information is the really important point. We all write. We write technical documentation or project documentation or whatever it is that we write. That information can be repurposed for a wider group very easily; you don't have to write reams of information. And just what Kevin said: once you're over that hurdle, once you've written the first blog, it's really easy. It's writing the first one.

Reed: Before we wrap up, I'm going to give you a quick lightning round and put you on the spot. Tell me about one mobility trend you're keeping an eye on in this coming year.

Appleby: For me the big one is Android, without a doubt. If you take this scenario where you supposed that Sybase has a choice: it can only develop for one more platform, so is it going to be Android or is it going to be Windows Mobile 7? The rise in Android of 700% on handsets year on year is just enormous. And it hasn't really penetrated the enterprise market yet. That's going to be the big trend for me this year coming.

Benedict: Yesterday I talked to a research firm that just finished face-to-face interviews with 100 SAP customers and their organizations about what topics they're most interested in. The fifth highest topic is enterprise mobility this year. I found that fascinating and right in line with a lot of the news and developments within SAP.

In addition to that, I think business-to-consumer mobile apps are huge. Companies, as John pointed out earlier, focus on these point solutions of fixing internal requirements and generating internal operational efficiencies with mobile applications. But companies are starting to look beyond that very quickly by asking what apps they can get in the hands of their customers to provide customer support better. For example, they can show new product catalogs easier or establish a closer relationship and develop loyalty with that customer through business-to-consumer mobile apps.

That leap between consumer and enterprise apps are closing rapidly. All the MEAP vendors and the enterprise focus mobility vendors are going to have to start looking at how they create those business and consumer apps as well.

Reed: Very good, I appreciate both the blogging inspiration and your views on mobility trends. We'll look for your latest work online at SCN. Thanks a lot for joining us today.

Before we sign off, I also want to make sure our listeners know how to access the mobility resources on SCN. If you're not registered for SAP's online communities you can register for all of them, including the Developer Network, Business Objects Community, and BPX Community at the same time. Once you're in the communities you can find plenty of [mobility resources](#) on [sdn.sap.com](#). In the User Productivity section, there's a mobility resource collection; also, in the blogging section there's a mobility category you can subscribe to and browse.

On that note I'd like to thank our listeners for joining us today for this SAP Community podcast. With that, that this is Jon Reed of JonERP.com signing off. We'll see you online at scn.sap.com.