A Community That Knows It All, Not a Community of Know-It-Alls

Summary
An IT professional finds commonalities and networking opportunities at Community Day, part of SAP TechEd '07 Las Vegas.

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Author Bio
Perry works for SAP Global Communications as editor-in-chief of SAP News, SAP’s internal online employee magazine. He is also a member of the SAP Corporate Publishing team. Perry started working at SAP in Walldorf, Germany in 2003, where he was employed as a translator. Prior to SAP, he held jobs as a language consultant for Volkswagen AG in Germany and JD Edwards in Denver, Colorado. Perry enjoys German beer and storytelling.
Katherine Corn is lonely. In the IT department at her company in Nashville, Tennessee, she is the only employee who works on developing internal workflow systems. Sure, she always has company during her lunch break, but no one who can relate to her at the "workflow level." In her local IT circles, payroll systems always seem to dominate conversation, and she yearns for a companion who commands the ins and outs of automated task forwarding. To find other birds of a feather, Katherine flew the 2,000 miles to Las Vegas in search of solidarity at SAP TechEd '07.

This is the story behind a lot of the partner and customer attendees at SAP TechEd '07 Las Vegas, held from October 1 - 5 in the ostentatious environs of the Mandalay Bay Casino and Hotel. Although a member of SAP Developer Network, Katherine finds the immediate gratification of face to face discussion extremely helpful. "This is my first time at TechEd, and I'm here to find out first hand what the latest developments are in my area."

Katherine signed up for the pre-conference Community Day, which brings together employee, customer, and partner members of SAP's virtual communities, including industry value networks, SAP Developer Network, Business Process Expert Community, Enterprise Services Community, and others, to discuss challenges and innovations in the IT industry. The day offered 40 sessions ranging from automated ABAP reports to developing engaging user interfaces. Katherine signed up for three sessions: "Workflow for Suits," "The Absolute, Undeniable, Underestimated Need for SAP Organizational Change Management," and "The Geek Gap."

During the workflow session, Katherine received a set of flashing pink bunny ears as an ice breaker, and discussed with SAP employees and other SAP customers the difficulties the geeks (IT) have communicating with the suits (business) in the realm of workflow. "I was a little intimidated at first," Katherine said, "there were a lot of people there that were really into the technical side of workflow. But all participants were eager to share their experiences and give tips on communication between the geeks and the suits.

Geeks and suits were the topic of another session Katherine attended. Business Process Expert Community evangelist Marilyn Pratt introduced the authors of the book "The Geek Gap: Why Business And Technology Professionals Don't Understand Each Other And Why They Need Each Other to Survive" Bill Pfleging (the geek) and Minda Zetlin (the suit). "We don't understand how poorly we are communicating," Pfleging said. "The suits need to know more about technology than their Blackberry manuals, and we geeks need to understand how the suits think - not in the process of technology but in the use of technology."

Then, in a Q&A session with special guest Tim O'Reilly, Katherine listened in on the Q&A, which handled topics from a blogger code of conduct to the concept of data as the main driver of business in the near future.

After networking and discussing the whole day through, Katherine learned a lot about SAP, and a little about herself as well. She hadn't heard about the Business Process Expert Community until Community Day. She realized that there are thousands of people in this community as well that she can network with virtually who also bridge the gap between business and IT on a daily basis. "The guys here are very knowledgeable," Katherine says. "I shouldn't have been intimidated at all, they are really open and encouraging - this is a community that knows it all, not a community of know-it-alls."