

SAP INFO

THE SAP MAGAZINE

■ Dear SAP INFO reader,

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Sincerely,

Your SAP INFO Team

Chairmen past and present discuss growth, upgrading, and SAP

Well Connected

Alan Bowling, new chairman of the SAP UK & Ireland User Group, and his predecessor Glynn Lowth speak to SAP INFO about the issues facing this user group.

SAP INFO: Your user group's retrospective of 2007 was quite positive, with across-the-board growth: more members, more meetings, and more conference attendees. Where do you see the group this year?

ALAN BOWLING: I see this evolution continuing. We have laid the ground for the user group in recent years by giving it a professional structure. We now have our own premises, Web site, accountants, and auditors. We have also increased membership from 236 to over 400 organizations and expanded our contacts with user groups around the globe. We are an independent voice of the SAP users in the United Kingdom and Ireland. This is our most important task and a primary focus.

SAP INFO: What is next on your agenda?

GLYNN LOWTH: We see the international influence as a very important vehicle for us, so we have joined the newly founded SAP User Group Executive Network (SUGEN). The regional SAP subsidiaries aren't necessarily covering the whole scope of what SAP does. The SAP UK subsidiary, for example, really concentrates on sales and marketing. So for us to influence SAP, we have to talk with the center of SAP. Doing this with the international user group gives us a bigger voice.

SAP INFO: Speaking of the international collaboration of SAP user groups, what forms of cooperation make sense, and where do you see the limits?

LOWTH: I don't think we are ever going to be founding a single user group. Each group covers a particular geography with specific issues. But we gain a lot of benefits. For example, our members can use some of the facilities of Americas' SAP Users' Group (ASUG) in terms of their online services because our group is an associated member of ASUG. Likewise, we learn about other customers' SAP systems from all over the world. Also, many of our members are globally active companies. It is good for them to know that we are involved in an international network.

SAP INFO: Migration and upgrading to SAP ERP is one of the most important issues for SAP's installed customer base. What is the situation among your members?

LOWTH: I can't point to a scientific survey, but in rough numbers, we found that 11 percent are still running SAP R/3 3.1. We have 59 percent of our members running SAP R/3 4.6 or SAP R/3 Enterprise. So there's a substantial proportion of people out there using older releases. The question is: Why don't they upgrade? Our goal as a user group is to help these members answer several crucial questions: Do we need to upgrade? What are the implications of upgrading? What about the additional functionality?

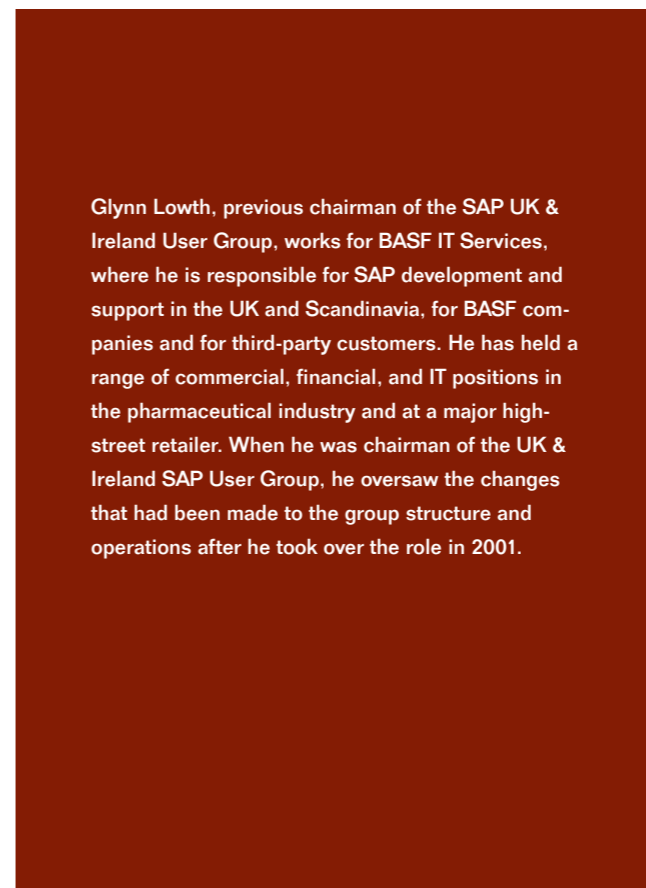
"I think that upgrading is becoming more and more of a business decision."

ALAN BOWLING

There are lots of questions that should get answered. Even though standard maintenance has run out, some companies still don't want to upgrade because they are quite content with their current system and are willing to pay high amounts for extended service and support that may still be cheaper than an upgrade. We want our members to rationalize the information around these questions to enable them to find the right decision for their specific circumstances. ▶



Alan Bowling is the chief information officer at Northern Foods plc. He was appointed chairman of SAP UK and Ireland User Group in November 2007. Bowling became involved with SAP eight years ago through his role at Northern Foods, where he is responsible for the management of applications and IT strategy and governance. After six years of working with the team to achieve Customer Competence Center (CCC) certification, he was most recently involved in one of the UK's first upgrades to SAP ERP, based on the SAP NetWeaver technology platform. He is also a representative of the United Kingdom and Ireland region within the International CCC Community, an international affiliation of national SAP user groups.



Glynn Lowth, previous chairman of the SAP UK & Ireland User Group, works for BASF IT Services, where he is responsible for SAP development and support in the UK and Scandinavia, for BASF companies and for third-party customers. He has held a range of commercial, financial, and IT positions in the pharmaceutical industry and at a major high-street retailer. When he was chairman of the UK & Ireland SAP User Group, he oversaw the changes that had been made to the group structure and operations after he took over the role in 2001.



■ SAP UK & IRELAND USER GROUP

This independent organization is operated and managed for the benefit of its members.

It provides meetings and discussion forums in a neutral environment where users can network, exchange experiences, and receive presentations from selected relevant companies. In addition, it offers numerous events throughout the year, covering a wide range of topics relevant to the opera-

tion and implementation of SAP software. They include presentations by:

- users on their own experiences
- SAP on the latest development in their products (sometimes including pre-launch information)
- selected vendors on their products where felt to be relevant and of interest.

▶ **BOWLING:** I think that upgrading is becoming more and more of a business decision. It is not a given; it is business benefit versus business costs. Some of our members are facing their very first upgrade and for the first time are going through the experience of understanding what it means and building a business case to support an investment.

“We really appreciate SAP’s openness...”

GLYNN LOWTH

SAP INFO: Overall, are your members quick to adopt new technologies?

BOWLING: Steve Rogers, the managing director of SAP UK & Ireland, mentioned a very interesting point in his keynote at our annual conference: the speed of change. How to take that change and turn it into real business benefit is becoming a big issue for most companies. I don’t think the technology changes themselves are an issue, but rather the pace and rate of change and how to take the change into the business in the smoothest possible way.

SAP INFO: What are the feelings about the new product-release road map of SAP?

BOWLING: It’s different from what it’s been before. We don’t have any experiences with the new model, so we cannot really estimate the advantages yet. The challenge for SAP is to deliver exactly what they said they will. Conceptually, it sounds like a good idea. The real proof is yet to come.

LOWTH: We really appreciate SAP’s openness, personified by Steve Rogers, who speaks frankly about deficits and is seeking to talk about them with us. I’m sure that some discussions between us – as representatives of the users – and SAP have led to positive results. But I can’t accept 100 percent of the credit. SAP also receives a lot of feedback from outside the user group. Certainly, we are one voice among others.

SAP INFO: Could you describe your levels of interaction with SAP?

LOWTH: We interact with SAP in a number of different ways and levels. For example, in our 16 special interests groups covering a wide range of technologies and functionality within SAP, we have planned 48 meetings this year. At most of those meetings we have someone from SAP from product level or account level representing SAP. The users can talk to them and greatly appreciate the direct interaction with SAP.

At another level, we have an operations manager, a full-time employee of our user group. He has a lot of contacts with the middle layer of SAP management. He is very often at the SAP UK headquarters talking to them. His work and good contacts enable us to find speakers for our conferences and meetings.

And the third level of contact is with the senior management of SAP UK & Ireland. We also attend other functions across Europe and across the world, where we meet with any management levels from Steve Rogers to Henning Kagermann. On the behalf of the users, we hopefully express their views and care for their points.

SAP INFO: What are your views on SAP Business ByDesign, and how have you reacted to this new delivery model?

BOWLING: It’s too early to say. We haven’t seen the product yet and only know what’s in the press releases. We have to wait for the first users’ experience. That would be a good question to ask in a year’s time.

LOWTH: We will see the new product this year in ramp-up, and next year in general release. Not before the end of the ramp-up phase will we consider palpable steps for following up. We will certainly keep our eyes open to see how the market accepts the new product.

Alan Bowling and Glynn Lowth spoke to Stephan De Maria, freelance journalist, Schwetzingen, Germany ■