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Sincerely,

Your SAP INFO Team
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?

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**“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.

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

GLYNN LOWTH

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

LOWTH: 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 handle the 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 cope with the business in the smoothest possible way.

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

LOWTH: It’s different from what it’s been before. We don’t have any experiences with the new model, so we can’t 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, personalized 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.