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Grape Escape 2010: Of Cloud & Angel, Fun & Games, and “In Vino Veritas” – Part 1

by [P.J. Jakovljevic](#)

Every June over past several years, after the high season for traveling to major vendor events subsides, and before everyone takes their summer vacations, a group of selected enterprise applications analysts have become accustomed to attending the [JRocket Marketing Grape Escape\(TM\)](#) event. “Grape Escape” is a signature event that showcases the intimate analyst relationships (AR) and event expertise that **JRocket Marketing’s** president and founder Judith Rothrock delivers to her enterprise software vendors’ client base.

Ideally, Judith will concurrently have three non-competing software vendors as her clients. She is quite picky about whom she accepts to represent. Namely, once she is “sold” on the vendor’s unique [value proposition](#), she becomes quite engrossed in crafting the winning marketing strategy and message, and becomes unequivocally dedicated to that company’s success.

I have seen her create great recognition and visibility for **Lawson Software** in the late 1990s, [for Deltek in the early 2000s](#), and lately for **UNIT4 Agresso** and **SYSPRO**. These were all obscure vendors (in the greater schema of things) before retaining her strategic marketing services.

One client’s executive has even described her as being “too darn demanding but also protective of her clients like a mother bear of her cubs.” For her deep commitment and passion Judith in turn insists on the same unquestionable involvement from the client’s top management (i.e., “to walk the talk”), and I am aware of a couple of rare cases where she has walked away from the client (by not renewing her contract) for the lack of a CEO’s commitment/enthusiasm.

The combination of major technology news, vendors’ executive speakers and their executive customer speakers, 5-star food and wine venues, plus artistic themes/entertainment, has been unmatched in either the vendor or marketing service community. It is a one-of-a-kind event that provides value both to JRocket clients and the analyst attendees that come from **Gartner** (including **AMR Research** and **Meta Group**), **Forrester** (including **Giga Group**), **IDC**, **TEC**, **Aberdeen**, **TechVentive**, **Deal Architect**, **Ventana Research**, the **Robert Frances Group**, and the **Altimeter Group**, to name only a few.

The Grape Escape Historical Background

[This year was the jubilee 10th Grape Escape event](#), although not counted in consecutive years. Judith held the first three in the late 1990s while she was the vocal Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) at Lawson Software, and my very first Grape Escape attendance was in 2000.

That year Judith “enriched” the event with her personal breaking news about leaving Lawson and taking some time off to figure out her next career move – which, after helping a Wall Street technology firm get sold to Sunguard, led her to founding JRocket Marketing in 2001. I attended

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all of the other seven events under the auspices of Judith's own business – **JRocket Marketing LLC**. Grape Escape reappeared each year 2003-2006 and again annually from 2007 to 2010.

The event idea was reportedly born from a conversation Judith had with some analysts one hot summer in the late 1990s when they half-jokingly said "You know, it's so stinking hot and we need to go somewhere in a cool place to relax and drink wine or something." At the time, an upscale restaurant in Greenwich, Connecticut called [Valbella Ristorante](#) had just opened a beautiful wine cellar. As Judith had some major announcements to make on Lawson's products, she cooked up (no pun intended) the idea of a summer get-away analyst event.

Initially the goal was to have several analysts sitting around a dinner table in the wine cellar, with brief presentations by a few Lawson executives and a marquee customer – no microphones attached and casual – with beautiful soothing music (classical guitar, piano, harp player – you get the drift) in the background. The official "presentation" time has always been limited one hour so that the spirit of the event (i.e., combining relationship-building and fun with "real news") is not compromised.

Her aim is not to turn Grape Escape into events that other software companies do – either all reception (fun and mingling) or all presentation (or too much presentation, i.e., "all work and no play") – usually combined with mediocre (*déjà vu*) food and nothing exciting in the official program (speech) category. Judith has even legally trademarked the event and she owns the rights to the name.

Today, the event is benchmarked at just over 20 analysts – small enough for fostering intimacies but large enough for a certain level of excitement when you add in the 6-8 speakers (and often a few more non-speaking vendor executives for the dinner table discussions). Over the decade-long history, the event has drawn over 150 different analyst attendees.

While I am fortunate to have it in my neck of woods most of the time, at least one third of the analyst attendees traveled 3,000 miles (mostly from California or Europe, [and not including my colleague Aleksey Osintsev, who drove from Montreal this year](#)) for just a 4-hour event because they must be finding the trip worthwhile. I for one would not travel that far if it was only for some schmoozing, food, and booze, but it is indeed much more.

Usual Vendor Suspects

To date, I recall the following JRocket Marketing clients participating in the event: [Aligo \(the mobile enterprise software company\)](#), Deltek, [Timeline Inc. \(now part of Global Software\)](#), **Meridian Systems**, UNIT4, SYSPRO, **FinancialForce.com**, and **Corefino** as (some of whom have been "repeat offenders"). Moreover, I have met another two dozen or so "C-Level" executives from these vendors' customers.

Vendors are not allowed to repeat showcased customers, as Judith wants fresh customers each year. She also insists that her vendor clients withhold a critical piece of that year's technology "news announcements" for the event so that the news is always "hard-hitting" and not "soft, everyday, no-news" news, which continues to draw analysts to the event.

While Grape Escape was named for an event of great wine and food (hence the name "Grape") and a way to "escape" on a hot summer evening, over the years Judith has also evolved the event to

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be related to a theme. Last year was logically geared to American History – where she married [the Old State House Museum \(where the US constitution was first read in Boston\)](#) to the historic election of President Obama.

As I still vividly remember, they served the exact food and wine from Obama’s inauguration dinner, while the attendees were tweeting menu items and in some cases pictures of the served food. This year was theater and Oscar related – hence the **Calderwood Pavilion Huntington** theatre setting, [the New York City singer songwriter Doug Nervik](#), and [the wines that were the same that had been “private labeled” for the Oscars this year.](#)

The piano-playing entertainer closed the 2010 event by poking musical fun at our feisty hostess. The lyrics below, set to the tune of “That’s Entertainment,” should give you a peek preview of the good natured roasting of the hosting vendors as well, as these vendor-related lyrics will be displayed only at the end of this series. For now, the lyrics below portray Judith quite well, in spite of the levity and some self-deprecation:

Who jeers, and who’s dying to yell?
 And who sneers when the concept is hell?
 But who cheers when ideas start to gel?
 That’s Judith Rothrock!
 Where’s restraint in the marketing ‘hood?
 Where’s the calm, and the sweetness, and good?
 Does it ALL have to be Hollywood,
 With Judith Rothrock?
 Who do you get when you’ve come ‘cross the pond?
 She’s smart, she’s alert, and above all she’s blond!
 But she’ll establish a bond –
 When she corners a client they’d better be compliant!
 Well, CHEERS to a girl who’s a gas!
 She’s a lass who’s got plenty of class!
 And at times she’s a pain in our...NECK!
 But let’s raise a cup (‘cause profits are up!)
 Because of ROTHROCK!

Let’s Dispense with Serious Business First

So, after the customary initial gathering at the event to greet all the familiar faces (and to meet a few new ones) and to have some fancy wine and hors d’oeuvres (or “finger food” in my lingo), this year everyone was summoned to the main theater for the official (“presentation”) part of the event. While Judith and her eight speakers took their seats at the decorated table on the stage, the rest of us spread out in the audience seating area.

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The first speaker to have his 10 minutes of fame was Jeremy Roche, CEO of FinancialForce.com (formerly **CODA 2go**), which is a joint venture between UNIT4 and **salesforce.com**. **FinancialForce Accounting** is the first international accounting solution to be natively built on the **Force.com** platform, which provides the **Salesforce CRM** customers with an unparalleled level of on-demand [customer relationship management \(CRM\)](#) and accounting integration. Although it is a brand new solution, FinancialForce Accounting is the result of more than 30 years of successful accounting industry solutions via UNIT4's **CODA Financials** heritage –installed at nearly 3,000 organizations worldwide.

FinancialForce.com: Already Having Hot Summer '10

Roche's first announcement was the delivery of **FinancialForce Summer '10** – the fourth release of FinancialForce Accounting, which includes a distinct collaborative accounting capability. Summer '10 customers will benefit from the social collaboration capabilities of **Salesforce Chatter**, which salesforce.com made generally available in late June 2010 (in fact, FinancialForce.com delivers three releases a year, which map directly to salesforce.com's releases).

What this means is that FinancialForce.com is now the only accounting system on the market with a collaboration system built right into it. The Chatter-enabled accounting application will allow more frequent and effective collaboration around sales opportunities, customer accounts, and customer service issues. For more details of these cutting-edge concepts and capabilities, see [my interview with Jeremy Roche on how Salesforce Chatter works](#).

In addition, the Summer '10 release has the following three additional features:

1. A completely new user interface (UI) that speeds customer training and data access via intuitive look-and-feel
2. New inter-company accounting and revenue enhancements, which are especially helpful to larger, more complex organizations operating with multiple hierarchies
3. Enhanced capabilities to support payment and collection processes by minimizing the number of steps it takes for payables and receivables business processes

Roche's second announcement of the evening centered around **VMforce**, the world's first enterprise Java Cloud, which salesforce.com and **VMware** recently announced. VMForce opens up the Force.com platform to more than 6 million Java enterprise developers by enabling these developers to build turnkey and quickly installed software applications without the need for manual configuration.

FinancialForce.com's new VMforce [Web services](#) connector tool provides the vendor with a whole new gateway to tie other applications directly into FinancialForce Accounting functionality. It is a well-known fact that Web services-based integration of applications is a tedious job that typically is one of the biggest time consumers in the implementation cycle. Out-of-the-box, VMforce Java developers will now have access to the accounting functionality they need to make their applications enterprise-ready more quickly and easily.

Early Adopter Customer Testifies

Susan Randal, Controller at **Wi-Fi Alliance**, a nonprofit international association formed in 1999 to certify interoperability of [wireless local area network \(WLAN\)](#) products, followed Roche to provide testimony of a customer experience. She said that the association began migrating to the

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Force.com platform in 2008 since the non-profit organization wanted a unified comprehensive contact database for its membership and for recruitment purposes.

Randal said her company selected FinancialForce.com in October of 2009 "Because, let's face it, we're partial to things unplugged." More than that, the on-demand product's robust [accounts receivable \(A/R\)](#) module seemed a good fit for the company's membership-based business model, which collects US\$6 million in annual membership and certification fees. FinancialForce's [general ledger \(G/L\)](#) and [accounts payable \(A/P\)](#) features rounded out the functionality Wi-Fi Alliance needed to make a substantial upgrade to its processes.

The firm also really liked the data dimension capabilities that allow it to track expenditures for tax and [fund accounting](#). In November 2009, the membership group was able to get an early start on its 2010 drive and generate membership invoices directly from the opportunities used to identify and track recruiting.

Then, in early 2010, the organization moved to the second phase of implementation, which involved producing a massive quantity of invoices associated with certification activity. Make no mistake, info comes straight from the certification system and gets turned into invoices.

In summary, Randal praised the internal control features, which provide huge benefits to cash-constrained organizations (which is about every company these days). And finally, [scalability](#) is there, as FinancialForce.com can support Wi-Fi Alliance's growth indefinitely into the future. That is critically important for an organization that exploded 61 percent in membership between this year and last.

The next step of the process will reportedly be to integrate the Wi-Fi Alliance certification system into Salesforce CRM. Once this happens, invoice generation will be automated to occur as early as when the certification documents are distributed. This is expected to improve the information and cash flow measurably.

Part 2 of this blog series will analyze the Grape Escape 2010 news announcements from Meridian Systems and SYSPRO. Until then, your comments and opinions about this kind of event as well as about FinancialForce.com's value propositions are welcome.

*Besides being a rookie father and a Starbucks addict (the two may or may not be related), **P.J. Jakovljevic** is a TEC veteran and an APICS buff. He is an equal opportunity analyst (EOA)—one of the first to pay due attention to the little guys that tend to be overlooked by the big analyst houses. P.J. is a proponent of "separation of church and state" (both in society and in the analyst world) and is committed to writing equally "tough but fair" analyses about all vendors and solutions, whether they are TEC clients or not.*

TEC BLOG: [http://blog.technologyevaluation.com/blog/2010/07/15/grape-escape-2010-of-cloud-angels-fun-games-and-"in-vino-veritas"---part-1/](http://blog.technologyevaluation.com/blog/2010/07/15/grape-escape-2010-of-cloud-angels-fun-games-and-)

JRocket Marketing: www.jrocketmarketing.com