

Jul

22

Grape Escape 2010: Of Cloud & Angel, Fun & Games, and “In Vino Veritas” – Part 2

by [P.J. Jakovljevic](#)

Part 1 of this [blog series](#) talked about the historical background of the [JRocket Marketing Grape Escape event](#). Grape Escape has become a June fixture over past several years, right after the high traveling season to major vendors' events subsides and before everyone takes their summer vacations. It 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 by giving them exposure to a selected group of industry analysts.

Part 1 also analyzed the news announcements by [Jeremy Roche](#), CEO of [FinancialForce.com](#), followed by the testimony from its customer [Wi-Fi Alliance](#).

Meridian Systems: Do Not Write Off the Construction Sector

The baton was then passed onto John Bodrozic, President and co-founder of [Meridian Systems](#). Infrastructure Lifecycle Management (ILM) is a term that Meridian created in 2004 and subsequently established it successfully as a market sector that includes the following three components: Plan, Build, and Operate (PBO).

In other words, Meridian's products address the needs of large capital infrastructure projects such as buildings, highways, malls, energy/utility plants, IT or telecommunications systems, and anything else one can think of that has a physical structure to it going through the above-mentioned phases. Indeed, you've got to plan something, then you've got to build it, and finally, you've got to operate it going forward.

So, when Meridian says it is “PBO-squared,” the company is talking about what it offers – Plan, Build, and Operate software applications for Project-based Organizations. While [much more details can be found in my 2008 blog series on the company](#), here is a brief rehash of its three core product lines:

1. **Proliance**: a complete Web-based ILM solution for large building owners and/or operators, real estate developers, and engineering-driven organizations managing US\$250 million or more annually in new project construction or facility renovations
2. **Prolog**: a solution suite offering both client-server and Web-based products that delivers construction project control and transparency (during the “Build” phase) to project-based organizations within both the private and public sectors
3. **Project Talk**: a cloud-based project management and collaboration solution construction professionals use to automate project processes and tasks, and to support team collaboration over the Web; ProjectTalk is powered by Prolog, i.e., it is the cloud-enablement of Prolog

Continued to page 2...

Meridian offers all types of deployment for its customers depending upon their needs: on premise, hosted, multi-tenant [software as a service \(SaaS\)](#), a private/hybrid cloud, you name it. Meridian customers care less about how they get their technology than what it will do from a project management and ILM perspective.

The company is really good at leveraging both the standard set of recurring ILM market needs and jumping into new programs, such as the projects attached to the US government's recent economic stimulus plan more precisely called [the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act \(ARRA\) of 2009](#). Meridian refers to these particular US stimulus-related PBO plans – “PBObama” in short, which usually gets a wry smile (if not a cringe) out of people. For more [information on Meridian's ARRA involvement](#), see [my recent blog series](#).

Oil Spill Giving Us All Food for Thought (Yuck!)

A brand new concept for me was when Bodrozic opined about how best one should manage infrastructure in the face of the unforeseen needs (developments). Indeed, what about managing infrastructure (being ready) for unexpected events, based on the recent spate of world disasters – hurricanes, earthquakes, oil spills, and other impacts of massive proportion on infrastructure?

The ILM tools are here for the processes, plans, and predictions. Wouldn't the currently unpopular **British Petroleum (BP)** benefit from an ILM solution? How about the city of New Orleans, which is still trying to get its arms around its collapsed public infrastructure?

Why not extend the concept and the technology capabilities of PBO infrastructure to addressing the unpredictable, the volatile, the unexpected? (At this moment, my [colleague Aleksey Osintsev whispered in my ear "Are we talking about Disaster Management Systems \(and a new DMS acronym\) here?"](#))

Levity apart, Bodrozic made it pretty clearly by even the few disasters he has referenced above that this is an area that has not been adequately addressed by business, government, and technology vendors. We were forewarned to watch for more information from Meridian on this concept, as the company would like to take a leadership role in extending this concept of PBO to support the world's greatest infrastructure challenges.

For those that think that there is not much happening in the construction sector, Bodrozic pointed out a number of his company's recent blockbuster wins worldwide. Meridian's global and footprint expansion is contributing favorably to its ambitious growth targets. Year over year, the company grew by 32 percent and touted its win ratio against competitors, which includes both **Skire** and **Oracle Primavera** (whom it sees most often in competitive situations) to be an impressive 65 percent figure (and improving).

Disney Customer: Entertaining but not Frivolous

Rajesh Agrawal, Director of the Management Controls organization at **Walt Disney Imagineering** in Glendale, California, gave the customer's perspective on Meridian. Walt Disney Imagineering is the creative arm of the **Walt Disney Company**, which is responsible for the “wow factor” one has come to expect when thinking of Walt Disney: the master planning, creative development, design, engineering, production, project management, and research and development (R&D) arm of the business. This encompasses all of the company's 11 theme parks, water parks, hotels, cruise

Continued to page 3...

ships, and “new media” technology projects.

As a matter of interest, Walt Disney is in the process of getting approvals to construct its 12th park in Shanghai, China, which will be a multi-billion-dollar project by completion. The company is also building out its first hotel and resort in Hawaii, and has recently purchased a piece of waterfront property in Washington DC that it expects to develop at some point.

In summary, Walt Disney Imagineering spends in excess of US\$1 billion a year, which is 75 percent of the capital expenditures for Walt Disney. In fact, the Imagineering division is the company's largest cost center.

Meridian Proliance was reportedly selected over Skire and **Tririga** for its ILM footprint completeness and the [Office Business Applications \(OBA\)](#) integration. Agrawal said “We selected Meridian with its Proliance product since Meridian offers a great product with excellent quality, but fortunately for us they've skipped the “amusement” part.”

He underscored that this was a considerable contract – a multi-million-dollar deal that rolls out over several years. Remaining on the “entertainment” theme, Agrawal facetiously said that the implementation project was a far cry from the stories of large software vendors whose installation processes are more like Disney's “Tower of Terror” ride than a successful enterprise system deployment.

SYSPRO: Giving New Meaning to “Customer is Always Right”

Brian Stein, CEO of **SYSPRO US** then took the mike for his 10-minute elevator pitch. **SYSPRO** is over 30 years old company with a US\$300 million revenue footprint, due to the combination of the vendor's software license sales and its systems implementations ecosystem (since the vendor operates 90 percent through an indirect channel). **SYSPRO ERP** is in use by 14,500 small and mid-sized manufacturing and distribution companies in 60 countries.

The vendor has a reputation for exceptionally strong and visionary technology, with a pragmatic view on both deployment and customer relationships. SYSPRO has code-named its **Grape Escape 2010** announcements “Simply Smarter VP” -- the letters “VP” being short for **Visionary Pragmatist**. VP is a very unusual approach that works well for many mid-sized manufacturing companies.

SYSPRO solutions provide this group of customers information visibility, agility, and control via a single technology platform that is not the result of multiple mismatched acquisitions, but instead based on a single holistic platform built from the ground up. Indeed, for a vendor of its size, SYSPRO delivers a complete and versatile ERP suite for manufacturers and distributors. Functionality has been delivered by SYSPRO organically, with no acquisitions in the company's history.

In addition, SYSPRO is all about trust and one-to-one relationships with each customer, and that extends doubly to its structured and measurable implementation methodology called *STARS (Structured Technique to Achieve a Rapid Solution)*. Namely, SYSPRO has possibly the highest customer retention rates in the industry and attractive price to performance ratios.

Continued to page 4...

In fact, over the past decade that I have been covering the company, SYSPRO has piled up a number of awards by various industry magazines and associations. I wouldn't be surprised if the company's USA Corporate office held more trophies than the **NY Yankees** and **Boston Celtics** together. For more [information on SYSPRO](#), see my [2008 blog series](#).

SaaS: SYSPRO as a Service

As for the Grape Escape 2010 news announcements, there were three major pieces of news. The first one was the introduction of **SYSPRO-as-a-Service**, an affordable subscription-based cloud deployment option that will roll out in two parts. Today generally available (GA) is a managed cloud service solution that is a single-tenant solution.

But that is just step one. By the end of 2010, the vendor will be delivering a SYSPRO as a Service in a [multi-tenant](#) option, with a [Rich Internet Application \(RIA\)](#)-enabled client designed to reduce cost, complexity, and improve overall data security. Most of SYSPRO's product is already in a multi-tenant architecture, except for the customization file system, which is slated to be re-architected later in the year.

SYSPRO has a deep partnership with **Microsoft** and stays ahead of the curve competitively with its **.NET Framework**-based foundation. For this multi-tenant deployment option, the vendor will be leveraging Microsoft's [Windows Communication Foundation \(WCF\)](#) to combine the functionality of its current user experience with one that is offered as a Service.

The second announcement was in the analytics arena. Last year at Grape Escape, SYSPRO ushered the six **SYSPRO Power Bundles**, leading with **Power Tailoring**, which has gotten a lot of publicity over the past year based on its deep and rich do-it-yourself (DIY) user experience capability. In other words, SYSPRO goes out of its way to enable ordinary users to tailor (personalize) the system with the same ease of personalizing a smart-phone via "skins" and what not.

At Grape Escape 2010, SYSPRO extended its Power Bundles to two more, starting with **SYSPRO Power Analytics**. This capability takes [enterprise performance management \(EPM\)](#) to a more exciting level for SYSPRO customers via real-time dashboards, what-if analysis capabilities, trend analytics, balanced scorecards, and much more.

By leveraging the abovementioned Power Tailoring capabilities, users can view these analytic gadgets any way they would like: via widgets, a top-10/bottom-10 ranking, and so on and so forth. Everything that SYSPRO does is with its customers' needs and benefits in mind. For instance, SYSPRO will gladly provide the hooks to **Microsoft SharePoint**, but for the customers that do not want to spend extra money on the SharePoint license, SYSPRO offers its native tools that can emulate SharePoint capabilities.

Mastering Enterprise Architecture (EA), to Boot

And finally, SYSPRO is introducing **SYSPRO Business Process Modeling**, the eighth addition to its Power Bundles. The company has learned through deep communications with its customers that analytics and business process improvements head their requirements this year and for the foreseeable future. To that end, SYSPRO has lately invested its R&D attention to providing a new process modeling and workflow capability as the two underpinning features.

Continued to page 5...

The **SYSPRO Process Modeling (SPM)** capabilities anticipate and collaborate with how SYSPRO customers do business. SPM provides a visual graph of all of the SYSPRO modules the company deploys, along with the following:

- A visual graph of the business processes the company uses
- Tailored to users' personal environment
- And leveraging users' appropriate role to interact with the module and processes

Additionally, **SYSPRO Workflow Services (SWS)** enables the creation and management of workflow processes by streamlining processes and promoting collaboration between roles. Some features here include the following:

- An in-process workflow engine
- Design capability to orchestrate personalized workflow scenarios
- A set of workflow controls run by a rules engine
- Tracking and notification capabilities

The above capabilities amount to sophisticated [enterprise architecture \(EA\)](#) capability, which I have yet to see provided natively even by the Tier 1 ERP vendors (**SAP** and Oracle might offer this via harnessing **IDS Scheer's ARIS** tools). Often, ERP users have to turn to the EA capabilities of **Metastorm, IBM, and Software AG**.

Stein wrapped up with a few notes about the recent release of **SYSPRO Version 6.1**, the most important and powerful new product and technology release the vendor has had in five years. Version 6.1 includes more than 1,500 enhancements and six dynamic new applications. I was one of many that attended Stein's Webinar in April introducing this new release, and [here is the report from my colleague Gabriel Gheorghiu](#).

One Happy Customer (with One Million Springs Attached)

Mike Gisonda, Director of IT for [Lee Spring](#) then provided a customer perspective on why this mid-size manufacturer has been happy with SYSPRO for 11 years. In fact, at the time of the event, the company has had placed its millionth sales order via SYSPRO ERP.

The 92 years old company from Brooklyn, New York is one of the top five manufacturers in catalog-based business springs. With more than 87,000 stock codes and 17,000 catalog items, there's a reason why the company currently has 100,000 companies contacting its website. **Lee Spring** is multi-national, with five manufacturing facilities in the US, four sales and customer service centers, and separate divisions in the United Kingdom, Mexico, and China.

SYSPRO's open architecture allows the manufacturer to integrate SYSPRO's applications with Lee's own customized solutions that the company has written in-house. **SYSPRO e.net Solutions'** architecture allows Lee Spring to easily do transactions within the product, retrieve data out, write reports against it, use the business intelligence (BI) tool for data dips and draw out critical information to make decisions. Also appealing has been SYSPRO's recognition to build products against macro concepts like lean manufacturing, inventory families and groupings, etc.

And when SYSPRO rolls out its newest technologies, products and features, it's seamless to the

Continued to page 6

customer. Lee has been through multiple iterations, multiple platforms, and multiple new modules, and yet the company has been continuously able to make these changes with little interruption. Even major migrations can be done over a weekend. Gisonda's running joke is that his team has more trouble with a minor shipping change done by **Fedex** than they do with a major release from SYSPRO.

Last but not least, Gisonda is the head of technology at Lee Spring, with a staff of only three that still carries global responsibilities. He couldn't possibly make this work unless he had an absolutely dependable software system, an iron-clad partnership with SYSPRO, the faith that they always deliver on their promises, and that SYSPRO will continue to evolve their product lines and technology platforms in directions that optimize Lee Spring's ability to be successful.

Part 3 of this blog series will analyze the Grape Escape 2010 news announcements from **UNIT4**. Until then, your comments and opinions about this kind of event as well as about FinancialForce.com, Meridian, and SYSPRO'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/2010/07/22/grape-escape-2010-of-cloud-angels-fun-games-and-%e2%80%9cin-vino-veritas%e2%80%9d-%e2%80%93part-2/>
JRocket Marketing: www.jrocketmarketing.com