

Jul

27

Grape Escape 2010: Of Cloud & Angel, Fun & Games, and “In Vino Veritas” – Part3

by [P.J. Jakovljevic](#)

Part 1 of this blog series talked about the historical background of the **JRocket Marketing Grape Escape(TM)** 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 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**. Part 2 analyzed the Grape Escape 2010 news announcements from **Meridian Systems** CEO John Bodrozic and **SYSPRO US** CEO **Brian Stein**, followed by these vendors’ customers (**Walt Disney** and **Lee Spring**, respectively).

Part 3 will analyze major news coming from **UNIT4’s Agresso** product line.

UNIT4 Agresso: Angels in the Cloud & All 4 Sustainability

Shelley Zapp, CEO of **UNIT4 North America** was the last vendor executive speaker for the evening. Zapp was there representing news on a broader corporate level. UNIT4 is the world’s sixth largest provider of [enterprise resource planning \(ERP\)](#) software for the mid-market with US\$516 million in 2009 revenues.

Despite challenging market conditions, UNIT4 had a strong first quarter in 2010. In fact, the company’s performance went contrary to competitors who showed declining or meager new license trends in the same period. UNIT4’s new software license revenue grew by almost 30 percent year over year. The company has the following three core solution sets:

- **Agresso Business World (ABW)** — a complete ERP suite aimed primarily at the mid-market professional services, non-profit, education, and local government sectors
- **CODA Financials** — a best-of-breed accounting software suite for mid- and high-end companies in manufacturing, retail, government, transportation, and other sectors
- **FinancialForce Accounting**, also a Grape Escape 2010 presenting solution that was depicted in [Part 1](#)

While CODA was the star of the recently held UK user conference (see [my series on the event](#)) ABW was at the center of the Grape Escape 2010 news announcements. Zapp introduced UNIT4’s second cloud deployment option, the first one being the abovementioned FinancialForce.com.

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This second [cloud computing](#) solution is called **VITA Cloud Angel**, which is a protective and versatile option for dynamic businesses looking to leverage the cost- and time-saving benefits of on-demand computing. This deployment option extends the low-cost “do-it-yourself” change advantages of the ABW’s underlying [VITA model-driven architecture \(MDA\)](#). The uniquely-built VITA architecture supports Agresso’s go-to-market strategy of focusing on *Businesses Living IN Change*, which the company calls *BLINC*.

The VITA architecture has been repeatedly credited for ABW beating **SAP**, **Oracle**, and **Microsoft Dynamics** in many recent blockbuster deals, such as the multi-million contract in Australia with the **Queensland Government** for their 1,200 school, 500,000 user **OneSchool** project. The low-cost change-enabling capabilities of ABW’s architecture are unmatched by any other ERP vendor in service sectors. Any BLINC organization – living in a world of compliancy, organizational, merger and acquisition (M&A) or other change – can benefit greatly from the VITA architecture.

With VITA Cloud Angel, ABW users now have the versatility to meet their evolving requirements on the following:

- Hardware infrastructure
- Data storage and processing locations
- Industry-specific deployment needs
- Available shared service requirements

VITA Cloud Angel provides rapidly deployed, turnkey solutions across the following five industry sectors: non-profit/charity businesses, healthcare services, emergency services, professional services, and local government and education. Each of these five pre-built templates are mapped to 80 percent of industry requirements, reducing typical ERP deployment cycles by several weeks or months.

VITA Cloud Angel Components

In light of many other vendors’ sparse explanations of their single-tenant cloud offerings (other than piggybacking on **Amazon’s** [infrastructure as a service \[IaaS\]](#) setup), UNIT4 seems to have done quite a bit of homework before releasing VITA Cloud Angel. What follows are the five major components.

1. *A Virtual-Machine (VM) Environment Choice*: VITA Cloud Angel offers multiple hardware deployment choices that allow businesses to migrate between virtual and on-site environments as they wish, including such options as:

- An Internal Private Console, where companies partition and optimize their own hardware)
- An External Private Hybrid Cloud Console, where companies leverage external hardware options
- A Hybrid approach that includes any combination of the above options

2. *The Perfect Private Cloud Environment*: The hosting requirements of VITA Cloud Angel will be managed by **UNIT4’s Hybrid Computing Center**, which provides ABW customers with a single point of contact, the terms and conditions, service levels alignments/changes as required, a centralized provisioning/reporting center, end user IT support and telephone/e-mail and self-

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service portal support. The following three hybrid private cloud options are available to manage/host an organization's data:

1. UNIT4's Hybrid Computing Center
2. **Amazon Web Services (AWS)**
3. Industry-specific hosting centers

3. *The Intel-Agent Data Privacy Protection:* This unique VITA architectural feature provides a complete set of administrator-only controls for maximum data/application protection. It is an intelligent search, monitor, and detection engine that gives VITA Cloud Angel customers the following benefits:

- It prevents/detects intentional or unintentional data breaches/mistakes
- It optimizes system uptime

4. *A Redundant Web Backbone and Data Storage Component:* This protective solution combines the best of the capabilities within the UNIT4 Hybrid Computing Center and the **Telecity** backbone. The virtual high availability of these operations enables data centers to be switched within seconds in the event of a problem. Fiber-optic lines provide an additional monitoring layer to provide immediate combined fail-over and data recovery.

5. *A Shared Service Option for Industry Partners and Associates:* A cost-effective option for companies in like industries, geographies, etc. The **ABW Shared Services** offering has been deployed by over 450 companies and is in use today by more than 77,000 active users. This shared services option is also being made available today via the new VITA Cloud Angel deployment option. In this model, companies get economies of scale by sharing one application, but retain autonomy through their own chart of accounts and with the separation of their own data.

How About an Environmental Angel?

UNIT4's second announcement addresses Environmental Performance Management and [Environmental Performance Index \(EPI\)](#) – something we have all certainly seen in the news recently as a priority. Environmental performance management is not just about managing disasters, since it is about analyzing, measuring, and projecting the measuring outputs for all types of businesses.

To that end, Zapp announced **UNIT4 Sustain4** – touted as the ERP market's most comprehensive environmental performance management solution delivered to date. UNIT4 is launching the solution out of its UK offices via a partnership with global environmental impact specialists: **Trucost**. UNIT4 will be extending partnerships throughout the world to stake its ERP leadership in this area.

UNIT4 Sustain4 was born in Europe based on new mandatory carbon emissions requirements that cover organizations using more than 6,000 megawatts per year of electricity. To give you a practical application – we're talking the equivalent of annual electricity bills of about three-quarters of a million dollars per year.

More than 20,000 organizations in the UK alone meet this requirement and will have to register by

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September 2010. Built using **Microsoft Sharepoint** 2010, Sustain4 uses Web 2.0 collaboration tools to deliver quantifiable outputs on the following metrics: carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions, pollutants output, chemicals and metals, energy and water consumption, and waste management.

Change Is the Way of Life (Even in Higher Education)

Leif Anderson, chief information officer (CIO) of **Augsburg College**, was standing between us and the dinner & entertainment. Based out of Minneapolis, Minnesota, the college accommodates just under 4,000 students, split evenly between the traditional post-high school population and adult education. Augsburg College prides itself on a 15 to 1 student to teacher ratio.

The institution supports more than 50 majors and has a resident student population from all over the world. Colleges like Augsburg do indeed represent a Business Living IN Change (BLINC) at least for the following two trends:

1. *Student Population:* 10 years ago, there was a relatively small percentage (20 percent or so) of the adult student population – meaning the mature, not 18 year olds fresh-from-high school crowd. These adults come to colleges for either additional degrees, add-on business related coursework, or simply to finish the degree they never got around to finishing. Today that number is an even 50 percent split between the traditional post-high school students and the adult students. This changing “customer base” has major change implications for colleges on many levels: enrollment needs, finance and payment, coursework and materials, communications, and the technology supporting all of these needs.
2. *New Credentials:* It used to be the one-off time that colleges had to worry about [educational accreditation](#) for new credentials. There are evolving standards on requirements for professors and it is challenging to keep up with both the accreditation needs and the tracking that the college is in conformance. Once upon a time this conformance maintenance was a simple spreadsheet-based task, but the issue is a lot more complex now.

Augsburg College replaced its legacy back-office product with ABW six years ago primarily to have an integration- and change-friendly platform. Technically speaking, there are four components of UNIT4's solution that make it the best on the market in Anderson's view:

1. Strong workflow support, for business process improvements
2. *FlexiFields*, for additional data input, increasing the power of customization and analytics & reporting
3. Document imaging, for storing all the required diplomas, certifications, etc.
4. Web self-service, for allowing all of the various user constituencies who connect with the system – students, teachers, parents, and administration — to gain access and complete the tasks they need done remotely

The final part of this blog series will provide some concluding remarks and end on lighter and humorous notes. Until then, your comments and opinions about this kind of event as well as about FinancialForce.com, Meridian, SYSPRO, and UNIT4 Agresso's value propositions are welcome.

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*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/2010/07/27/grape-escape-2010-of-cloud-angels-fun-games-and-%e2%80%9cin-vino-veritas%e2%80%9d-%e2%80%93-part-3/>
JRocket Marketing: www.jrocketmarketing.com