

BURHANS: Welcome to our third installment of Getting the Most out of IBM U2. I'm Jackie Burhans, the U2 Portfolio Manager, and I get to be your host for today's episode which examines how you can get the most out of the IBM U2 Early Adopter Programs or EAPs.

I've got a couple of guests here with me today to talk about this. First of all, let's talk about what is an EAP, and I'd like to hear from Tom Garcia. Tom is the U2 product manager responsible for the tools products and he has really spearheaded our use of Early Adopter Programs in the U2 team. So Tom, give us your thoughts on the U2 EAPs.

GARCIA: Thanks, Jackie. U2 has really adopted the EAP programs because we're really trying to get in touch with our customers and understand what their requirements are earlier in the development cycle.

We want to focus on things like consume-ability, give our customers the chance to get involved earlier in the process, get the chance to download code as we develop it so that if there are issues with the way we've developed it, if there are better ways to leverage what it is that we're doing, we get that input and we're able to affect the product much sooner.

Our customers are able to experience the latest technology,

they're able to experience the things as we develop them, and really focus on the things that are going to be part of the final development of the project.

Along the way we've built some tools to make this a little bit easier. We've built Web sites where the content is downloadable, where we no longer have to go through and develop individual legal documents in order to leverage the code in order to be able to take advantage of it. We're out now able to go through the process much simpler and deliver code to our customers very quickly.

BURHANS: Great thanks for that summary, Tom. Now I'd like to turn to John Zagnoli, our other guest. John is a development manager on the U2 team responsible for the tools and the QA group as well. John has been involved in every one of our Early Adopter Programs so far. So John, give us your perspective on Early Adopter Programs.

ZAGNOLI: Thanks Jackie. I think the most challenging part of designing our products is understanding our customers' requirements. And we've, we can a lot of time trying to have a dialogue with our customers via e-mails and other methods, but the most direct and most clear way to do that is to actually talk to them.

And during the process of the EAP we found out what their,

you know, what their pain points are, what it is in the products that really, that they need to really focus on.

And having the developers talk to each other one on one, it is really bringing out some of those requirements...those needs from our partners and customers.

GARCIA: Yes that's a good point, John -- the fact that during this process we have regularly scheduled conference calls where our developers who are building the code have the chance to interact with the developers who will be using it.

BURHANS: That sounds like a great idea. This leads me to another question that I think we should address. And that is, what really is the difference between an Early Adopter Program and a beta program and will we continue to have beta programs with our products? John, do you want to start with that one?

ZAGNOLI: A beta program, when we're at the point of a beta release we have locked in the functionality and what we're looking for is feedback on specific defects, regressions from earlier releases that will prevent the partner or customer from using the product.

In contrast, an EAP gives the partners a chance to actually

give us input on the design decisions -- to say, hey, this isn't going to work, have you thought about doing this? Oh, okay, yes, we can do that, we have time to do that.

GARCIA: One of the other differences is EAP tends to be a very small group. It's by invitation only, we work directly with those partners to make sure that they are getting the information before anybody else. And then when we move to a beta program, it expands the number of participants.

BURHANS: Okay, well, I think that helps to differentiate between those two. Can you guys cover for us who participates in an EAP? What sort of person would be involved in that?

ZAGNOLI: We're looking for partners and direct end users who will test specific new features in the product. We're not so much interested in making sure that every bit of functionality is exactly the same as it was in the previous release but is the new, are the...is the new functionality we're putting in meeting their requirements?

So there may be problems with the product and we don't need to, we don't want to focus too much on those, on these things but we need to focus on those new requirements. We also need partners who are willing to commit time to it.

BURHANS: It does take some time to do this testing.

GARCIA: Yes. We're also really looking at the EAP programs as a way to bring our teams up to speed. So we're bringing in our support organization, we're bringing in consulting services, education, IT specialists. We're making sure that all of those teams are up to speed and able to leverage the technology once we do announce it.

BURHANS: And then of course to run the EAP, you have product management, development management, developers and support participating in that as well. Okay, well that all sounds very good.

So the key question of course for this podcast series is how does somebody get the most out of a U2 Early Adopter Program? Tom, John?

GARCIA: Well, I think the very first thing is decide to participate. You really need to look at the things that we're announcing, go to our Web site, look at the newsletters and say, you know what? This is a piece of technology that I really want to get my hands on and play with. So make the commitment and decide that this is something that is important.

ZAGNOLI: You need to dedicate resources for the duration of the project. It can't be just a, well, I'll get to it when I have time sort of project. You need to make a commitment, even if it's not full time, a couple of days a week to work with this new technology. I think that is going to be the key because if people are well intentioned but don't dedicate the resources, it's been proven that it won't get done.

GARCIA: Right. And you've got to get started early. You can't wait until the EAP program is at its conclusion because then you'd have less of a chance to influence the direction of the product.

ZAGNOLI: Make it a, make the program a priority. This is the future of your product as it's going to be based on what we put into our next release.

GARCIA: Right. And it's going to impact your ability to go off and sell your own technology. Also you have to make sure you participate in the conference calls.

We've got these regularly scheduled conference calls that we have and by participating in those, you're going to get a chance to interact with the developers or product management, with the support teams to let them know what's really happening. Sometimes it doesn't come across in an

e-mail as well as it does over the phone. So those are really a good chance to interact.

ZAGNOLI: And during these conference calls don't be afraid to provide feedback of what's working and what isn't working. It's, that's where we really get the value out of this. So if it doesn't work and you don't think it's the right way to go, let us know that. Let us know it early as we said.

GARCIA: It's important. And along the ways of feedback we are going to send a survey out. Respond to that survey, let us know formally how things worked.

Also if you have the opportunity, give us a chance to use your quotes in terms of what it is that worked, what didn't work, how this is going to affect your ability to sell your products in the forms of quotes that we can use in our marketing.

And finally, we've got feedback forms that we provide as part of these Early Adopter Programs; participate in those because that's a chance for you to collaborate with others who are using the technology very directly.

BURHANS: Well, that sounds great. I like to hope you've now got everybody excited about joining one of our Early

Adopter Programs. Can you let our customers know how they would go about finding out about an EAP and signing up for it?

GARCIA: Sure, well there's a number of ways. The first is we'll give information in our U2 newsletters. So look in the U2 newsletters, and we'll announce things like the System Builder XA Early Adopter Program, the .Net Early Adopter Programs, Unidata, Universe, how ever it may be....

BURHANS: Of course that implies everybody needs to make sure to subscribe to our newsletter so that they're getting this information.

GARCIA: Absolutely.

Second, go to our Web site on the offers page and the offers page will tell you what Early Adopter Programs are coming up. And then once you decide you want to participate, send a note to u2askus@us.ibm.com and we'll know that you want to participate, we'll communicate back with you and give you the details on the program.

BURHANS: All right. Well, thank you Tom and John, for participating in today's podcast and sharing your expertise.

Are there any closing comments you want to make before we go?

ZAGNOLI: Yes, get involved now. You can make a difference in the U2 products. Be a part of our team.

GARCIA: Make sure that you do get involved today because those partners who have participated have found it extremely valuable. So please participate.

BURHANS: Thanks very much. Okay transcripts of today's podcast which will include all relevant links that have been mentioned are available on our Web site by following to U2 podcast link from the main page.

e-mail us with your feedback, comments and suggestions for future episodes, or click the feedback link for any one of our podcasts and post your ideas on our developerWorks forum. Be sure and join us for our next episode and learn how to get most out of IBM U2 support.

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