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How Utopia Complements SAP to Provide Enterprise Data Life-Cycle Management to the SAP Ecosystem

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Utopia Inc., headquartered in Mundelein, Illinois, with offices in Dubai, Singapore, and Bangalore, is a systems integrator and strategic consulting firm focused on enterprise data life-cycle management (EDLM). Utopia began its partnership with SAP in 2005 and since then has engaged with the SAP ecosystem on many levels, including the Americas' SAP Users' Group (ASUG), the SAP EcoHub, and the SAP Service Marketplace. In addition, an SAP partner services advisor (PSA) helps Utopia navigate SAP's ecosystem and highlights the most relevant resources for the company.

The following questions were posed by SAP to Steve White, program director for the Software Solutions Alliance Leadership Council, which is part of IDC's Software Business Strategies group. Steve had the opportunity to interview Utopia Inc.'s Senior Vice President of Business Development and Channel Sales John Ferraioli about his company's partnership with SAP.

Q. Who is Utopia, and what does the company offer?

A. Utopia Inc. is a systems integrator and strategic consulting firm that focuses primarily on enterprise data life-cycle management. EDLM is an umbrella strategy that combines business processes, people, and applied technologies to manage and improve the life cycle of master data from its creation through archiving.

Enterprise data has become a key asset for major enterprises as technology and systems have advanced and particularly as better business insights from what can often be distributed systems have become a key business requirement. As a data specialist, Utopia has developed a unique view of the life cycle of data within major enterprises, and it offers a range of services from enterprise data strategy and systems integration to data migration, data quality, and data governance.

Utopia's clients are a who's who of names across industries such as oil and gas, utilities, process and discrete manufacturing, consumer packaged goods, transportation, engineering and construction, distribution, telecom, healthcare, and financial services. Clients tend to be large (over \$1 billion) distributed companies that may have been through a number of mergers and acquisitions and as such have large volumes of data often existing in distributed systems, multiple locations, and inconsistent formats. Utopia uses its life-cycle approach to support its clients in defining an overall data management strategy and then operationalizing that strategy to manage and improve their data quality.

Utopia has been in business since 2003 and is headquartered in Mundelein, Illinois (just north of Chicago). The company also has offices in Dubai and Singapore and a center of excellence in Bangalore, which is ISO 9001:2000 certified.

Q. What is the market/industry context that made partnering with SAP a solid strategic choice?

- A. The importance and the concept of data as a corporate asset have been growing over the past decade. Utilizing this valuable data to gain insights into internal processes as well as client behavior can become a differentiator depending on the market businesses are in. The challenge has been that as technology infrastructures have grown and often become more dispersed, both defining and managing this data have become more difficult. Add to this the current economic environment where companies are looking to get more out of their software investments, optimize the investments, and get the right reporting integrity, and the data and the quality of that data can be the linchpin.

Utopia believes that its partnership with SAP is able to address this issue. Both companies are dealing with the largest of enterprises utilizing major SAP applications and with complex IT environments. Utopia brings an information management foundation that allows its clients to get the best out of these systems.

For Utopia's clients, it's a compelling argument. They get a comprehensive data management strategy, one that embraces everything from how data is created to end of life and archiving and gives the customer a road map between SAP and Utopia to help the customer execute for the long term versus a shorter-term project approach. Data management becomes a process for the customer rather than a one-time event.

Q. What was the strategic reason that Utopia decided to partner with SAP, and what was the specific "trigger" that made it decide to invest in a partnership with SAP?

- A. In terms of the trigger that made Utopia decide to invest in a partnership with SAP, it was a little different — in fact, it was personal as well as opportunity driven. It was personal in that John Ferraioli is actually an ex-SAP employee. In his time at SAP, John was responsible for the Master Data Management platform, and since 2005, he had been working with a number of partners that were focusing on the quality of data management to enable SAP customers to drive to cleaner, more organized data. Utopia was one of these key partners.

Through the work with SAP from 2005, Utopia also saw the opportunity for EDLM growing, and when John joined Utopia in 2008, it set about teaming with SAP in a much more aggressive fashion, with a focus on developing more of a precise solution for SAP customers.

Q. How has the company engaged with the SAP ecosystem?

- A. Utopia has engaged with the SAP ecosystem on many levels. It is very active in ASUG and participates in the regional chapter meetings as well as specialty interest conferences of the group. The company also attends and participates in SAPPHERE, SAP's annual conference, which is run in partnership with the ASUG annual user conference. Utopia sees both areas as great opportunities to engage with the wider SAP ecosystem, specifically with SAP customers, other SAP partners, and SAP staff, to extend its ecosystem awareness or footprint.

Utopia also engages in the SAP Service Marketplace and the SAP Developer Network (SDN) and has found that both are excellent resources for knowledge sharing, best practices, and how-to guides. This information is a key resource for Utopia's consultants to receive guidance and also gain and maintain their knowledge.

As the partnership has deepened, Utopia has been working with an SAP PSA and has found these interactions invaluable to navigate through the many resources available through the SAP PartnerEdge program and the SAP ecosystem. Utopia already takes part in the partner marketing activities available, such as Webinars and customer events, and has recently been exposed to the SAP EcoHub, which it sees as a very promising route to greater awareness of its solutions. Utopia is investing through its marketing team to update its presence on the SAP EcoHub, with the aim of increasing the presence and awareness of Utopia in the SAP ecosystem as well as opening up further opportunities to collaborate with other SAP partners.

Through its relationship with the PSA, Utopia is being prompted to think of its solutions in other ways; for example, how it might present its data integrity offerings in some form of dashboard and how it might work with SAP and SAP partners to achieve this.

Utopia also highlighted that it will continue to focus on its regular contact and briefings within SAP with relevant sales, marketing, and product teams. The company sees this activity as complementary to its work to drive a presence with SAP EcoHub, ASUG, and the SAP Service Marketplace. These regular interactions are part of its key business development focus and continue to drive opportunities in both directions.

Q. What has been the impact for Utopia?

- A. Utopia has seen a lot of momentum across the board as the partnership has developed. Specifically, it has seen its opportunity pipeline expanding, and its business has been growing as a result at around 30–40% quarter over quarter.

The awareness of its EDLM offerings both in the market and more specifically within the SAP ecosystem has also been increasing. This growing awareness is seen not only in the pipeline of opportunities but also in the increased calls it is receiving from SAP to collaborate in this space. The fact that Utopia is receiving calls from SAP folks it has never met suggests to the company that its solutions are having an impact on the SAP ecosystem and that there is real customer value.

With this momentum in opportunity pipeline and the resulting demand, Utopia has continued to hire through the tough economic period and sees the hirings as a key indicator of the impact of the partnership investment.

Q. What have been the key lessons learned for Utopia, and what advice does it have for other firms?

- A. In terms of key lessons learned, Utopia highlighted that because SAP is one of the largest and most complex organizations in the software industry, it is important to be able to navigate to the best resources to be successful. Utopia invests in this from a business development perspective but also has found the support of its PSA invaluable.

Utopia has worked diligently to ensure that its solutions complement the value that SAP brings to its clients. Utopia does not want to become a "me too" partner, and clarifying this positioning has allowed it to clearly articulate the joint proposition that Utopia and SAP can bring to their mutual customers to help them meet their business goals. This approach also has driven and continues to drive more valuable interactions with the SAP folks within the SAP ecosystem.

As Utopia has invested further, and clarified the value it adds to SAP and its customers, it has seen reciprocal investment and support from SAP. Utopia mentioned that it has seen a great partnering mentality from SAP in their engagements.

Q. What, in your opinion, is the ecosystem's "best kept secret" that Utopia found valuable?

A. For Utopia, the "best kept secret" is actually a combination of things, as it mentioned that there is so much available within the SAP ecosystem. The formula or combination for Utopia consists of the great resources and information that are available in the services network and SDN, the overall positive partnering culture it has seen from SAP, and the support it has received from the PSA to navigate the ecosystem and highlight the most relevant resources for Utopia. As Utopia has worked with its PSA over the past year, and its PSA has become familiar with Utopia's business, the company has been made aware of more and more relevant and useful resources and opportunities to invest in. Utopia sees the regular calls with its PSA as a critical element of the partnership.

Utopia also stressed that a partner should not come into the SAP ecosystem with its hand out; it is important to approach it as a partnership or handshake. Taking time to understand SAP's objectives has allowed Utopia to work more effectively to identify and work toward joint goals and objectives.

Q. How does Utopia plan to leverage the SAP ecosystem in the future?

A. Utopia plans to leverage the SAP ecosystem with continued investments in all the elements it is already engaged with and work with its PSA to build on its understanding of new elements it can leverage.

In the short term, Utopia is focusing on building out its presence on the SAP EcoHub, which has recently been extended to include services partners. Utopia commented that it is impressed with the SAP EcoHub and that SAP has converted it into a place to go to for both customers and partners of SAP.

Utopia also highlighted that working with a blue chip company like SAP has great opportunities and that if you take the navigation path SAP provides and steers you down and apply some sweat equity, you will get results.

ABOUT THIS ANALYST

Steve White is program director for the Software Solutions Alliance Leadership Council (SSALC), which is part of IDC's Software Business Strategies group. Steve works with the SSALC members to define and research the key topics that affect strategic alliance investments and provides analysis into alliance trends, best practices, and benchmarking. In the past two years, this has included in-depth council discussions on SaaS, key performance indicators, and alliance organizational best practices.

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