

The Eternal Donut of the Soul

0. Introduction to the Podcasts

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Just a grumpy DBA who questions.

That's the theme of this set of podcasts. These podcasts have been put together to allow DBAs, Developers, Managers and Users, who primarily use Oracle technology, to get a different perspective of their environment.

The goal is to get you to question core assumptions made, question concepts, question traditional views and to question why you are even doing what you are doing. By questioning and then answering those questions can we begin to cleanup our work environments, remove unnecessary bureaucracy, improve database performance, simplify our application environments, make the workplace simpler, saner and more adaptable to changing technology.

These podcasts have been assembled by Marcel, a DBA and Developer from down-under. Don't worry about the surname, once you focus on pronouncing it you will get lost, focus instead on what these podcasts are saying. And what they say is that there is a need to question how we do things in our application development environments. These podcasts will look at the bigger picture covering database and software development. They will look at the issues created by setting up a bad work culture, the fundamental flaws in all database and application models, the roles and relationships between management, developers, DBAs and users. They will also cover bad assumptions made with PL/SQL and performance, flawed notions when attempting to be database independent and dealing with management.

The podcasts will also cover the core concepts behind multimedia web development. Starting from the fundamentals and first principles. Then going all the way to the issues of configuring e-commerce and security. The multimedia concepts will introduce notions, issues and concepts most people will never have experienced or heard of, and will look at web development from a different perspective.

Your antagonist and donut eating grumpy DBA is Marcel. He has been a DBA since 1988 when he was introduced to the wonders of mainframe databases. Prior to this he first started programming in 1982 on a Tandy Model 3 and from there progressed to Pascal, Modula, Lisp, Prolog, C and a whole host of 4GLs that have now been forever vanquished from the computer landscape. In 1990 he was introduced to Oracle on MVS, then VMS. Later in life after working on Unix, Windows and Mac he still clings to the demented viewpoint that VMS was and is the best ever operating system, thereby showing that what is best doesn't win. He even believes that MVS has a lot of strong points and that Unix could be improved a lot if they adopted the lessons learnt from 20 years of exposure to these mature dinosaurs. Being a realist and trying to prove the point he is adaptable, he has left the VMS world behind and now works on Linux, Windows and Macs.

Marcel spent four years in the 1990s working for Oracle in Canberra, which is the capital of Australia and not Sydney as commonly assumed. He still lives in Canberra, likes being there, and that mentality probably explains a lot. He has worked and spent time in most Government departments, doing consulting and has done a lot of Oracle training. The training he did covered DBA topics, Developer topics, security, operating system, programming and designing. Pretty much everything except Oracle Apps and the App server.

He has written a number of papers, won a number of awards for them in Australia and some abroad. He has presented at User group conferences and enjoys presenting at them. The last 8 years he has spent a lot of time focused on multimedia development. Starting with the earliest releases of Oracle8, along with interMedia and various file types, he has been building many web based applications. These include multimedia ones, e-commerce, shipping and booking systems. With a DBA, Developer and Manager hat on, he has had to learn new concepts from scratch and build systems that work well, scale and are non traditional by their very nature (try building an OLTP web based application).

Marcel graduated from the Australian National University in computing and has always believed (since 1986) that the future of artificial intelligence is through extending databases to handle this capability. He has spent his spare time looking at neural nets, fuzzy logics, simulation and other AI concepts trying to understand and come up with a future architecture for making machines smarter. Since working heavily in multimedia, the solutions required to address the AI conundrums have become more apparent. It's this attitude of understanding multiple disciplines, rather than focusing on the one and specializing in it, that is the fundamental attitude behind a lot of what Marcel does. It's the belief that the solutions to many problems are found across many skill sets and disciplines.

The art of questioning everything stems from this. It comes from ensuring that we do not get ourselves caught up in a comfort zone of technology, believing that it will never change and thus making very serious mistakes. By reviewing and questioning core concepts, we either strengthen our view of them or get ourselves in a position where we can dismiss them. This can make for a very unstable and dangerous world to work in. It also goes against the grain of what we are used to and have been taught. What has though been shown to happen time after time is business must be willing to quickly change and adapt to new markets, business practices and attitudes or go out of business. Only by practice can we learn to cope and master this change, and then turn it to our advantage. These podcasts start by questioning a lot of core assumptions and trying to show they are not as stable as we once thought and were taught. As parts of the belief system crumble around us (read this to be: become outdated as technology and the market place change) we can survive and cope with it and not feel so threatened by it.

The drive to understand AI has led Marcel to look at thinking strategies and core concepts behind how the mind works. In particular the human interaction in the workplace and how people come up with ideas that seem to be out of the box. More importantly what strategies, habits and techniques allow programmers to design new applications, DBAs to diagnose problems and designers to think up new interfaces. It's only by looking at this, understanding it and using it, can we hope to solve some of the hardest programming issues we are facing with databases and multimedia.

Marcel is antagonistic, and this is done deliberately. Being nice doesn't work. Being mean doesn't work, but it does make him feel better. So does a good beer, a warm donut and another donut, with a whisky. DBAs have learnt this attitude as a protective measure, and as a result have caused much harm in their environment. By attacking all sides, poking fun at them, and basically exposing their mannerisms, he hopes that this will wake them up and get them to question their position, why they do what they do and more importantly, think differently and change the environment they work in. Australians are known to be brash, beer swilling and at times good at Olympic sports, but even though we mock the Kiwis, laugh at the cricketing prowess of the poms (*Australian slang*), ignore Canada and try and prove to the yanks we can act better than them, we as Australians have a culture where we cut down the tall poppy and go for the underdog. We try and question attitudes and we don't take for granted what we are told. We try, we don't always succeed, but it's there, we give it a go.

These podcasts have been put together for two reasons. One being ego (in particular to prop up an ego deflated by a recent lack of donut consumption), the other being to reach a bigger market. Multimedia, the web and databases have been around in concepts since Oracle first started supporting the web in 1996. It's mature. It's stable. It's fast, and yet no one really even knows it exists. They think they have to use other inferior tools like PHP, Perl and .Net. They think databases can't handle multimedia being stored in them and they don't believe a database can deliver html pages fast out of the database.

It's been frustrating trying to reach an audience who has sufficient interest and experience to care about these things. Most developers don't even try and use the object oriented features in the Oracle database. They hope they will go away. They stay in their zone of relational comfort. For them, multimedia is just too hard. Its abstract and it's just another thing to learn, and who has time to learn new things? It's seen as hard or maybe given to another team to look after. These podcasts will shed light on this subject and put into a new perspective where relational really is in the world, and how over the next ten years their cozy little world of relational concepts will be pushed to the side as newer ones come onto the scene.

These podcasts cover multimedia, DBA, Developer, performance tuning, PL/SQL and other database concepts. On the face of it they appear haphazard, random and disjointed. This is not the case. They are all integrated and joined at the hip. Each is as important as the other. Each is a piece in a jigsaw puzzle that when finally assembled will give forth a new picture of programming, tuning and managing multimedia in the database world.

And to break up the monotony and ensure that the heavy diatribes along with technical jargon don't overwhelm the senses, there will be breaks where we let you experience the cultural aspects of some of us Australians.

So from these podcasts we hope that you will gain a new understanding and experience with multimedia and databases. Let the show begin...