

Donuts for DBAs II – The Migration to Oracle9i

By Redmond Bim.

Is it worth the effort to upgrade to Oracle9i? This is a question most DBAs are having to ask themselves. The release of Oracle8i is on its final release, V8.1.7 - and the pressure is on from Oracle to move to Oracle9i.

As is typical of this column, the question that is raised is designed to highlight a flaw in the whole process the industry has gotten itself into. It appears that the users of computer software are always under the mistaken impression that software upgrades are there for their benefit and they will upgrade when they are ready to upgrade.

Though this philosophy seems sounds, after all, (we are now in a customer centric environment), it's a philosophy that is doomed to eventually cost more and be more troublesome to deal with that the alternative one about to be suggested.

All software grows, evolves and expands. With each new release, bugs are fixed and new ones are introduced. The more complex the software the more bugs there are. Each new release brings hope in a number of areas:

1. That the current show stopper bugs are fixed
2. That the performance is better
3. That it runs on the latest operating system release

Software growth is a natural part of the process of application development, so when it comes to a project, the one key element that is missing, is factoring in the growth of this software. By software I mean the database, the

operating system and any other key support tools in the environment.

It is always assumed that there is no software growth, so no budget is allocated for it. So when the time comes to upgrade - and it is worth stressing this - that time always comes. There is no money to do the upgrade and this is where the fireworks begin.

In a number of cases it has been observed, that by the time the funds arrive, more funds are ultimately needed to perform the upgrade than would have been spent doing the upgrades on a regular basis.

A good analogy is car maintenance. If you service your car every 10,000 km it is likely to perform better and work well, than if it only ever has the one service at the 200,000km mark.

When a project is in the initial stages, upgrades and maintenance on a regular basis must be factored into the life of the application. Initially it might add a cost to the project, but it will cost more if it is not factored in.

If you haven't guessed where this article is going you didn't read the previous one, because eventually the cause of this unforeseen and mistaken bad planning can be levelled fair and square in managements lap.

The excuse all management secretly know about, is that it doesn't really matter what the long term costs are. If they are on the career move path, then all they are after is to sign off on a really low cost project to make it look good for themselves. They know full well that in two or three years down the track it will be someone else's problems to deal with.

So many times I have seen applications languishing in a mummified state of existence because of the short term thinking of inexperienced and career driven executives.

This is because the whole process of managing projects is flawed. There is no inherent long term thinking or incentives built into projects to ensure that they are looked after and maintained for a lengthy time.

The attitude is that once a project is finished its funding should be cut. Maybe a trickle should be given to maintenance, but generally no more money is allocated to the projected. If an upgrade needs to be done funding needs to be found.

So the call goes out. Wake up management and think long term. Put processes in place to ensure that projects are well maintained once the initial stage is completed, and be willing to upgrade the database on a regular basis because upgrades are a fact of life.

If you haven't worked it out, Redmond Bim is hiding behind an alias because he (or she) is afraid of being found out and discovered. By remaining anonymous he can walk the streets safely at night knowing full well no one will ever beep him needing emergency maintenance to be done on a database.

If you want to contact Redmond and either congratulate him on this article or want to know where he lives so you can frail him alive for writing such nonsense, then you are more than welcome to send an email to the publishers of this magazine. Under careful supervision these emails will be forwarded to Redmond's private email address. Suitable versed articles might appear in the next column.