

Aras ACE2014: Ready “Right Now”

CIMdata Commentary

Key takeaways:

- *Aras’ ACE2014 conference had a theme of “Right Now”; all the Aras presenters focused on what could be done right now with Aras Innovator*
- *Aras emphasized their new products and coming innovations including a native 3D viewer, digital mockup utility, new mobile apps, electronic component engineering and a new approach to ECAD integrations, as well as their expanded product management team*
- *Resilience, a PLM solution’s ability to enable changing technology and business requirements over a long time period (greater than 10 or 20 years) including customizations, was a key point for several Aras presentations*

Aras held their latest ACE conference from April 29 through May 1 2014. This annual event continues to grow; this year there were 400 registrants from around the globe, up from 321 last year. The theme of this year’s conference was “Right Now,” an appropriate follow-on to 2011’s “Be Different,” and 2012’s “Do More.” Stringing the themes together aligns well with the positive energy that permeated the conference. Attendees were encouraged to network with each other, and were openly excited about PLM and what can be done with Aras Innovator right now. In addition to the keynotes, there were three presentation tracks covering the “Basics” for those new to Aras PLM, “Technical” for those currently implementing Aras PLM, and “Business” for those expanding Aras PLM into other areas of their enterprise. Sessions extended into the evening and then discussions carried on into the night at the receptions. Sessions in the main hall included keynotes from Peter Schroer, Aras’ founder and CEO, and Simon Floyd from Microsoft. Customers including GE Aviation, Schrader Electronics, MAN Diesel & Turbo, and CNH Reman presented information about their implementations, which in many cases were launched into production in less than one year.

Peter Schroer delivered his keynote emphasizing a variety of Aras facts:

- 14th anniversary
- 6 years of double-digit growth
- A 46% subscription revenue increase in 2013
- A 99.5% subscription renewal rate
- Aras Innovator V10 was released, which includes HTML5 and Firefox support
- The product management team is up to 6 people and recruiting continues
- Professor Dr.-Ing. Martin Eigner, from the University of Kaiserslautern and founder of EIGNER + PARTNER GmbH, an early innovative PDM solution provider, will be joining the Aras Advisory Board

In addition to HTML5 and Firefox support, Mr. Schroer announced what products and updates are available right now including a digital mockup (DMU) utility from partner Kisters AG and a full suite of ECAD integrations, and 3D PDFs can be generated natively and supported by the ubiquitous Adobe Reader. A new mobile app supporting Microsoft’s mobile platform is available in the Microsoft App store. Aras’ choice to support Microsoft’s mobile platform including phones and tablets makes sense given their support of the Microsoft stack, but it is

unclear how successful this will be considering the relatively low adoption rate of Microsoft's mobile products.

Aras was particularly proud of an independent scalability study that was done in response to a challenge issued by a leading automotive OEM. Using Microsoft SQL Server 2012, Aras Innovator was able to support 125,000 concurrent users, and after upgrading to SQL Server 2014, 1 million named users and 250,000 concurrent users were supported with less than one second response times. CIMdata has not seen a published report showing this level of scalability from any other solution provider. The scalability reports can be downloaded from the Aras website.

In addition to what's available right now, Aras announced the following new products during ACE:

- Component Engineering, a solution to allow access to commercial libraries of 400 million standard electronic parts through the IHS CAPS Universe Database. The initial implementation enables searching of IHS's electronic parts catalog. When a match is found, the item and its supporting meta-data, attributes and appropriate documentation can be used to create a new item in Aras Innovator. It will be interesting to see the adoption rate and how it evolves to support components supporting other disciplines.
- A native HTML5 view and markup application will be released with V11 in the second half of 2014.
- Secure Social is Aras' take on how to integrate unstructured data within a PLM solution with proper security, control, and context. It will be tightly integrated with the new HTML5 view and markup application. Secure Social is anticipated to be released with V11 in the second half of 2014. While social makes sense, all the PLM solution providers have struggled to get the right use cases implemented within their solutions. CIMdata is looking forward to seeing Aras' Secure Social in action and how well it is adopted.

Other interesting things that Aras is working on include:

- Aras announced a new strategic partnership with Altium that will integrate commercial part data from Component Engineering with workflows that support common ECAD related processes. CIMdata is looking forward to see the enablement of new ECAD processes in a cross-discipline approach and how they support systems engineering, a topic of our ongoing research.
- Technical Publications, a solution to manage complex documents that include mechanical, electrical and software data, and information was also announced. The intent of the solution is to enable the configuration of documentation such as manuals and field bulletins to be included in the product configuration and change management processes. The solution is in development with a client and will be included in the product delivery roadmap in the future.
- Business Intelligence and Analytics, a solution that will provide advanced capabilities by leveraging Microsoft's BI technology. Microsoft and Aras are working together to bring the product to market.

Additionally, a new initiative was launched this year, the Aras Community for Automotive Innovation (CAI). Bill Bone, formerly of General Motors, was hired as Aras' Automotive CTO and will run the community. The focus will be on a broad range of automotive PLM issues

ranging from infrastructure through applications for OEMs as well as the tier suppliers. Visualization, the new Component Engineering solution and Application Lifecycle Management (ALM) will be key initiatives for CAI.

As in previous years, Aras included two Solution Showcase sessions where Aras users and partners were provided the opportunity to show off their innovations in a live 5-minute demo, without slides. Presenters queued up on either side of the stage and as soon as one finished the next one started. The solution showcase is a great way for users and partners to demonstrate the support of the Aras community. In many cases the demonstrated solutions are available for free from the Aras project site.

The Aras product management, service, and support teams all presented in the various tracks on subjects ranging from basic to very advanced, providing something interesting for all attendees. In each Aras presentation they emphasized what could be done right now with Aras Innovator. Presentations¹ are available on the Aras website.

Aras is rather unique in the PLM Economy in that it publishes the product roadmap publicly, and allows voting to influence the roadmap. Aras representatives reviewed the roadmap process and demonstrated the capabilities of the new interactive roadmap available on the Aras website. Product managers are committed to getting more customer interaction and are required to visit customers on site to help ensure that product specifications are correct.

Finally, Mr. Schroer delivered a technical session on “Resilient PLM,” which directly relates to CIMdata research on PLM Investment Sustainability. A resilient PLM solution is one that can easily and cost effectively adapt to new business requirements and be readily upgraded to support evolving IT infrastructure over a long time period even when heavily customized. He also reviewed how Aras Innovator supports the concept of resiliency.

Conclusion

Aras ACE conferences are a great place to experience everything Aras. The energy level was high, and people were genuinely having a good time talking about their PLM strategy and what they had accomplished. There were a broad mix of industries and company sizes represented, with people ranging from business people looking for solutions to specific problems to hard-core techies. A lot of networking occurred among attendees before and after sessions, in the solution provider area, and at the evening events. The sessions provided great content and practical, useful information. It should be noted, Aras does not charge people to attend the event and allows any interested person to attend which definitely shows their commitment to the PLM community.

CIMdata continues to be impressed by the passion in the Aras community and the focus of Aras Corporation. Aras Innovator continues to grow in both breadth and depth. The Aras team at ACE demonstrated new capabilities and discussed how their solutions satisfy customer needs right now. The customer presentations showed the flexibility of the Aras Innovator suite in how it can adapt to many different industries and address complex problems within their companies. Aras’ openness and community support was evident from the public presentation of their Roadmap to the inclusion of customer demos in the Solution Showcase sessions. CIMdata is looking forward to see how the Aras products progress against the roadmap and how the roadmap evolves over time. If your company is interested in Aras, the conferences are well worth attending. ACE2014 events will take place later this year in Europe and Asia.

¹ <http://www.aras.com/ACE2014>

About CIMdata

CIMdata, an independent worldwide firm, provides strategic management consulting to maximize an enterprise’s ability to design and deliver innovative products and services through the application of Product Lifecycle Management (PLM). CIMdata provides world-class knowledge, expertise, and best-practice methods on PLM. CIMdata also offers research, subscription services, publications, and education through international conferences. To learn more about CIMdata’s services, visit our website at <http://www.CIMdata.com> or contact CIMdata at: 3909 Research Park Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48108, USA. Tel: +1 734.668.9922. Fax: +1 734.668.1957; or at Oogststraat 20, 6004 CV Weert, The Netherlands. Tel: +31 (0) 495.533.666.