Accelerate 2014: A Growing PLM 360 Community

CIMdata Commentary

Key takeaways:

- *Autodesk held their first ever Autodesk PLM 360 user event, Accelerate 2014, in Boston, MA, a fitting location*
- *Customers showed their delight with the solution, supporting many varied use cases, some traditional for PLM and many extending to new areas*
- *Autodesk is transforming their company and their offerings to respond to overarching trends in products, and means of production and consumption*
- *Autodesk is thinking differently about enabling product development, and is addressing longstanding technical and usability issues in PLM in innovative ways*

On September 16 and 17, 2014, Autodesk held their first ever Autodesk PLM 360 user event, Accelerate 2014, in Boston, MA. This was a fitting location for several reasons, as outlined by the event host Ron Locklin from Autodesk. Most notable is the fact that almost exactly three years ago Autodesk changed course and formally announced their entrance into the PLM market at an analyst event in Boston. The company and their solutions have come a long way since then.

This event was mainly a celebration of some of Autodesk's most innovative PLM 360 customers, including:

- OYO Sports, a local Boston manufacturer of Lego-compatible figures, puts other companies to shame with time to market measured in hours, helping them quickly react to trades and other changes in the sports world to produce and stock sports figures that help create memories for fans.
- Quirky helps make "invention accessible" and is relying on PLM 360 to be agile, track resources, communicate clearly, connect with manufacturing partners, and much more.
- Electrical Components International, a provider of wire harnesses to customers from automotive OEMs to small companies, uses PLM 360 to support "classic" PLM processes like BOM management and change control.

The word celebration was chosen carefully because the excitement in the room was palpable. These customers and others in attendance are happy to be able to move from a world of network drives, spreadsheets, and Microsoft SharePoint to the cloud-based PLM 360. Based on presentations on day two, this is only the beginning.

Andrew Anagnost, Autodesk Senior Vice President, Industry Strategy & Marketing, spoke about "The Future of Making Products." His stated goal for his talk: to have the "weirdest" presentation at the event. In that, he failed, because he did an excellent job talking about the megatrends affecting the means of production, preferences in consumption, and even in what it means to be a "product." He spoke of the move toward fabless production, with networks of experts around the world coming together quickly to develop and deliver products, forming temporary organizations that are increasingly replacing traditional enterprises and even extended global value chains. Today's consumers have very different expectations for what they are buying. People care about where products are designed, sourced, and made. It is even better if they can participate in some way in the product's definition and creation, with

Quirky a perfect example of this trend. People jump in to fund ideas so that they can quickly get products that they can relate to in fundamentally new ways. The notion of a product is also changing, with an expectation that just about everything will be "connected." This is true even if it makes no apparent sense to do so, making this new trend just like many before it follow the precept that people do things because they can, not because they should. Mr. Anagnost and Autodesk are convinced that these trends are creating the biggest Industrial Revolution since the first one. To respond, Autodesk is changing their products, how they bring them to market, and just about everything about their business. One good example is their Spark open source 3D printing platform. They envision a day when rows of CNC machines will be replaced with 3D printers delivering products locally just as apps are downloaded today to our smartphones.

Brian Roepke, Director of PLM and PDM at Autodesk followed with some exciting new announcements for the Autodesk PLM 360 platform. From its initial release, PLM 360 has focused on enabling business processes in the cloud, and left the heavy lifting of mechanical CAD (MCAD) data management to their on-premise Vault solution. No more. In an upcoming release, Autodesk will add MCAD data management on the cloud to PLM 360. Many users will access this functionality through a familiar Windows Explorer interface, making it look just like any other network drive, an approach used by at least one Autodesk competitor. This approach makes check-in/check-out and other product data management (PDM) functions almost transparent and addresses an objection to PDM adoption by many engineers. Mr. Roepke also spoke of an innovative approach to addressing another objection to MCAD data management on the cloud, moving large amounts of data to and from the MCAD user. Using technology from the Ilesfay acquisition, "transfer avoidance™" in PLM 360 will enable it to learn about the contents of the files moved with each upload and download, and subsequently only move the data that was changed. The company claims that this will be possible with a wide range of MCAD data formats and will reduce bandwidth by 5 to 30 times over traditional approaches. If successful and widely used (and mimicked), this technique will help to eliminate that objection to PLM.

Many PLM solution providers are talking about providing access to their solutions across a wide range of platforms, from desktops to mobile devices. Some believe that you can only build a high quality mobile application if you think "mobile first." Others are focusing on HTML5 as a cross-platform technical solution. Autodesk is using HTML5 too, but demonstrated some new techniques they are using to dynamically change the UI for different form factors. This can help address the issue of UI elements that are the perfect size on the desktop being too large for fingers on a touchscreen. CIMdata looks forward to seeing this functionality in action upon release. For users the most exciting thing about all of this new functionality may be that it will be included in the PLM 360 release at no additional cost.

In conclusion, this first-ever Autodesk PLM 360 user event went off without a hitch, and the excitement among the attendees and the Autodesk team was infectious. Over 90% of PLM 360 customers are new to PLM, which is only good for the market as a whole. New delivery models like Autodesk PLM 360 serve to shake up the status quo. It is true that most of their customers are small enterprises, but others are taking notice. Accenture, an Autodesk PLM 360 partner, had a prominent role in the event, echoing the remarks of Mr. Anagnost about the changing nature of products and product development, and showing their interest in the platform and the disruptive role it might play. Autodesk showed some exciting new functionality that expands the processes and use cases they can support, and their pricing and packaging could start to attract larger and larger firms. This is where things get interesting.

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