

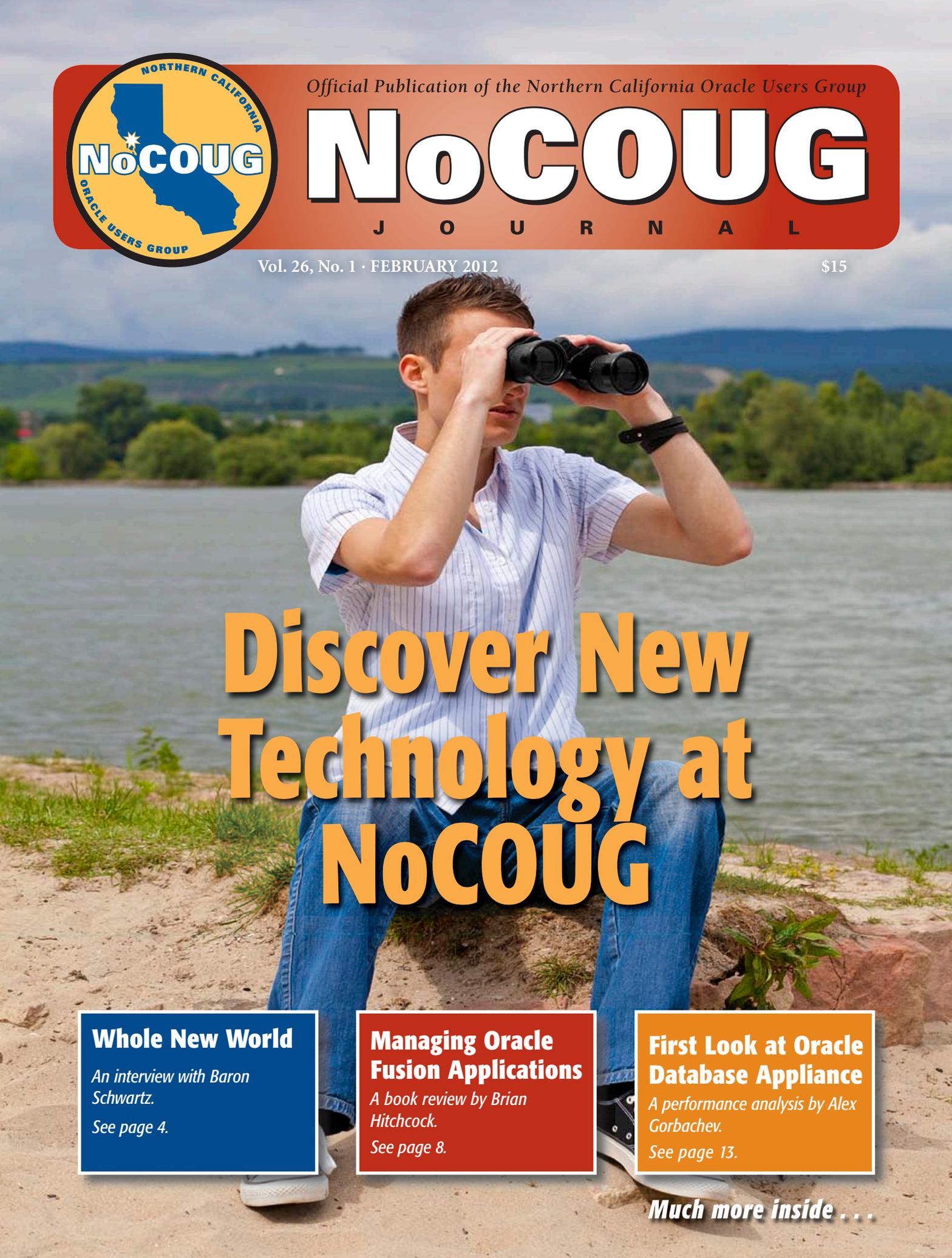
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Managing Oracle Fusion Applications

A Book Review by Brian Hitchcock

Details

Authors: Richard Bingham

ISBN: 978-0-07-175033-2

Pages: 350

Year of Publication: 2011

Edition: 1

List Price: \$50

Publisher: Oracle Press

Overall Review: Worthwhile overview of what Fusion Applications is all about and why it represents such a big change.

Target Audience: Those interested in a high-level look at Fusion Applications.

Would you recommend this book to others: Yes.

Who will get the most from this book? Anyone who needs to understand what it will mean to transition to Fusion Applications.

Is this book platform specific: No.

Why did I obtain this book? See Overall Review below.

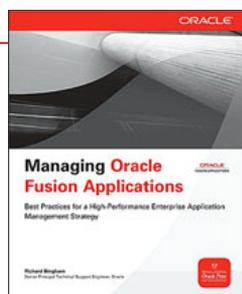
Overall Review

Fusion Applications is a bigger change than you realize. It's a bigger change than I realized.

If I had seen this book on the shelf, I would have flipped through it and dismissed it. It looks like a lot of descriptions of acronyms made up of other acronyms—recursive acronyms. But I did read it, and I'm glad I did. The move to Fusion Applications requires moving to open standards, and that requires learning about all those acronyms.

I need to be prepared to support Fusion Applications. I found many resources, and among them were three books from Oracle Press. This is one of them, along with *WebLogic Server 11g Administration Handbook* and *Oracle Fusion Middleware 11g Architecture and Management*. Since I have reviewed other Oracle Press books, they sent me copies of each to read and review.

Reading this book really helped me understand just how big a change the move to Fusion Apps will be. The description of the history of Oracle Applications, both those developed by Oracle and those acquired by Oracle, is the best I've ever seen. It provides the context I've been looking for to understand why this is happening and why it has to be such a big change.



I understand that many Oracle professionals who currently support Oracle Enterprise Suite and other products in what is now called Oracle Applications Unlimited will be looking for resources that show them the technical details of implementing and supporting Fusion Applications. This book will not appear to be relevant, since it doesn't attempt to address those issues. However, Fusion Applications is not just Applications Unlimited with some new stuff bolted on the side. It is a complete overhaul and integration of all the various applications products with some new stuff mixed in. Wrapping your head around all this requires a high-level review, and that is what this book provides.

Introduction

Unlike most books I've reviewed, this one has some of the best information in the introduction. Don't skip it. In the first few pages, we find this statement: "The structure of this book is intended to help you first build a basic understanding of Fusion Applications . . ." Indeed—and you need this high-level overview to get that basic understanding. From "A Brief History" on, this introduction helped me the most. It gave me the context I was looking for, explaining how the evolution of applications, access, and user experience all led to Fusion Applications.

Chapter 1—A Fusion Applications Product Overview

This chapter covers the size and scope of Fusion Apps. The product families are explained (Financial Management, Human Capital Management, etc.), followed by a discussion of the functional architecture.

Chapter 2—A Fusion Applications Technical Overview

The user interface is explained, as are dashboards, worklists, and the incorporation of social networking. The use of model-view-controller architecture is a good example of abstract concepts that I would not have thought I needed to know about. I looked it up online and read about it. This shows just how much different Fusion Apps is from the products we use now. Further examples include orchestration—which relates to SOA—and BPEL, all of which I would have dismissed as way too academic for me. Learning about all of this helps. I will be installing "artifacts" and patching "composites"—concepts that I never had to deal with in Enterprise Business Suite. Also new to me are web services. Fusion Apps has more than 1000 web services supporting all the functional objects and tasks.

The tech stack is discussed, and it includes many more acronyms. Also significant is the explanation of how Fusion Applications is built on top of Fusion Middleware. This had confused me for a long time, but it makes sense now. Again, this is important information to understand for anyone who has to figure out Fusion Apps. It is here that WebLogic Server makes its appearance. In many ways, Fusion Apps is WebLogic Server. I had been trying to understand why I needed to know about WebLogic Server, and this also makes sense now.

The “Processing Walkthrough” section made me appreciate how integrated Fusion Apps is. There are a lot of new concepts to become familiar with. How to extend and customize Fusion Apps is also discussed. This will be a big part of working with Fusion Apps. With so many applications integrated, the possibilities for extension are much greater, as are the challenges of supporting all of this.

Chapter 3—Successful Enterprise Application Management

Here the author describes the Enterprise Application Management role and why it is more important than ever due to the increased complexity of Fusion Applications. The simple definition of this role is that it has responsibility for the enterprise application and making sure it is available to users. This definition is then broken down into five areas, and individual chapters describe the relevant features of Fusion Applications that support each of these areas. These five areas are addressed in Chapters 6 through 10.

While it is implicit in this discussion of complexity and roles, it is also plainly stated: you will need dedicated resources for Fusion Applications. You may currently have resources that support various pieces of Applications Unlimited, but that won't be enough to take on Fusion Applications as well.

Each of the five areas of Enterprise Application Management is described. *Reliability* involves keeping users happy, completing business processes on time, resource monitoring, preventative support, and resolving issues as they arise. *Availability* means no downtime and providing multiple environments for tasks such as testing and development. *Performance* covers monitoring for failures, setting thresholds to detect low performance due to bottlenecks and high performance indicating underused resources, business process performances, core services performance, and hardware and operating system performance. *Optimization* involves finding ways to improve all of the areas already described. *Governance* includes security, data quality, and managing change.

You can dismiss this discussion, but you are already doing some form of all of these tasks, however informally, in your current environments. Fusion Applications will support (and, I think, *require*) all of these areas more formally, by design, with utilities built into the product.

This chapter concludes with a discussion of what it means to succeed at managing the enterprise application. I like the following statement: “[T]he modern enterprise application is no longer a collection of linear software programs overlain by a static set of front-end forms.”

And there it is. You won't be able to manage Fusion Applications from the command line alone. The complexity requires more sophisticated tools to manage the environment. And yes,

this means lots more GUIs. You don't have to like them, but you can't avoid them anymore.

Chapter 4—The Fusion Applications Lifecycle

Here we learn about the lifecycle models used by most IT departments. The alphabet soup is especially deep with RAD, ALM, ILM (no, not the special effects place), ITSM, ITIL, and finally COBIT. We are told that none of these is really applicable for Fusion Applications, and then we are presented with the Fusion Applications Management Lifecycle Model. This model is used to show how the five areas of Enterprise Appli-

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cation Management discussed earlier fit into an overall lifecycle model for Fusion Applications. This leads to chapters 6 through 10, each of which describes the specific features of Fusion Apps that support each area.

Chapter 5—Fusion Applications Management Toolbox

This chapter is less than six pages long. (When does a chapter become so small that it's no longer a chapter?) It's small because it's the introduction to the next five chapters. Each chapter discusses the tools available within Fusion Applications to address the specific application management area. The goal of this is to provide some structure to a large set of tools and utilities to make it easier to know what to use in which situation.

Chapter 6—A Reliability Management Toolbox

To help manage the reliability of Fusion Applications, you need to look at the Diagnostic Test Framework (DTF), which allows you to run diagnostic tests. These tests can be used for troubleshooting or for validating the health of application components. Functional Setup Manager is used to capture configuration information. Incidents are created when something goes wrong in the applications, the Fusion Middleware (which is the foundation that Fusion Applications is built upon), or the database. The content and management of incidents is discussed.

A big part of reliability management is seen in the extensions made to Enterprise Manager. We are told that EM is “the single most important tool for monitoring and managing the complete Fusion Applications technology stack.” Time to get comfortable with EM. I have supported Oracle Applications for some time and have never needed EM before. This is symbolic of the big change that Fusion Applications brings. Now I need to use EM all the time.

Chapter 7—The Availability Management Toolbox

The important point here is that while all the application components may be running, not all the business processes may be. Business Service Availability is discussed, along with Fusion Applications Control, which is an extension of Enterprise Manager and has many dashboards to monitor the availability of components and the SOA-based composite applications as well.

An interesting point is made here, namely that each product in Fusion Applications comprises one or more Java 2 Enterprise Edition (J2EE) applications. This means that each product handles all aspects of rendering forms and pages. There is no other server that does this for the product applications. Once again, Fusion Applications is a big change from what has come before.

Fusion Applications Control is also used to monitor the availability of Fusion Middleware. As another example (are more examples needed?) of just how big a change Fusion Apps is, consider the MBeans Browser that is part of Fusion Apps Control. MBeans are the Java Management Extensions (JMX) that are used to contain the configuration of servers and data sources and other components. The MBeans Browser is used to examine and modify the MBeans. WebLogic Server (WLS) is the central component of Fusion Apps and is monitored in Fusion Apps Control as well. Database availability is monitored through Enterprise Manager Database Control or Grid Control.

Chapter 8—A Performance Management Toolbox

Fusion Apps Control is used to monitor the performance of products, SOA, and business process execution. Enterprise Scheduling Services (ESS), which is similar to Enterprise Business Suite Concurrent Manager processing, is also monitored for performance from within Fusion Apps Control. Yet another significant change: in Fusion Apps, each product family has its own ESS, instead of one Concurrent Manager processing environment. This means that you need to monitor, through Fusion Apps Control, the ESS performance for each family separately. Fusion Middleware, WebLogic Server, and the database all have separate areas within Fusion Apps Control for performance monitoring.

Chapter 9—An Optimization Management Toolbox

This chapter covers which Fusion Apps tools are used to get more done more efficiently and to find new ways to do things. A big part of this is documenting the configuration of the many components and services. The Oracle Enterprise Repository stores all this information and is useful when new applications need to be built on existing application services. The Diagnostic Test Framework (DTF) is used to configure tests that can validate the configuration and the data before an application is put into use. Data captured by DTF helps identify processes that should be optimized.

In Fusion Apps, most application components run largely independently of each other. This is why most application components are now referred to as a service that is called by other services to build an application. This means it can be more complex to make changes in one service and document the impact on all the other affected services.

Chapter 10—A Governance Management Toolbox

Here we see the features used to oversee security, configuration, data management, and patching to achieve various governance and regulatory requirements. SOA governance is a new concept, needed to ensure standards within SOA applications. Security management is provided by Oracle Access Manager (OAM), Oracle Identity Manager (OIM), Oracle Authorization Policy Manager (OAPM), and Oracle Web Services Manager (OWSM). There are separate GUIs for these products. It is interesting to note that Fusion Applications does not provide comprehensive change management functionality at this time. Given the complexity of Fusion Applications, this is certainly needed.

Chapter 11—Getting and Staying Healthy

This chapter covers a lot of topics. The following statement needs to be reviewed carefully: “Application support requires a specific set of abilities that is often overlooked . . .” This is all too true. Fusion Applications is more complex and will require more resources dedicated to application support. Other areas that are covered include capacity planning; patch planning; data quality, including data fixes; system testing; and customization management. The flexibility inherent in a services-based enterprise application system also means that extensions and customization can be more extensive than in the past. This also means that more effort will be required to manage these customizations.

Chapter 12—Planning for the Future

Predicting what will come next is challenging. This chapter provides some thoughts on how Fusion Applications will change as it matures. For example, it discusses what business process might come along next, as well as possible changes to configuration management and the patching process.

Conclusion

Fusion Applications is a big change. This means that people with experience in the current Oracle applications offerings will need to embrace change. Most people will be new to Fusion Applications, so this is a great time to get started. This book is a good way to get exposed to just how much is new and different. You won't learn how to install Fusion Applications, but, whether you accept it or not, you really do need to become comfortable with all the new ideas, acronyms, and processes that make up Fusion Applications. This book is a very high-level view of what will be involved in managing Fusion Applications. I think everyone involved would benefit from reading this book. ▲

Brian Hitchcock worked for Sun Microsystems for 15 years supporting Oracle databases and Oracle Applications. Since Oracle acquired Sun he has been with Oracle supporting the On Demand refresh group and most recently the Federal On Demand DBA group. All of his book reviews, presentations and his contact information are available at <http://www.brianhitchcock.net>. The statements and opinions expressed here are the author's and do not necessarily represent those of Oracle Corporation.

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