FROM:	JOHN EVDEMON
SUBJECT:	6TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS RULES FORUM 2003 (11/2-11/6)
DATE:	12/1/2003

Summary/Recommendations

The International Business Rules Forum first met in 1997 to promote the fledging Business Rules community. The conference has rapidly grown from a small, "boutique-style" show to attracting well over 300 attendees (still small by some standards, but definitely trending in the opposite direction of most conferences). This year's conference was held in Nashville, TN at the Opryland Convention Center from 11/2 – 11/6 (the first two days of the conference was devoted to tutorials). The mission statement for this year's conference was "Opening New Doors of Opportunity"- recognizing the progress Business Rules have made from theory to a "first class" citizen in the software development and deployment process.

Key takeaways from this conference are:

1. Business Rules enable more agile systems and processes, enabling key decision areas (sometimes referred to as "choice points") to be decoupled from the underlying application – thereby avoiding a procedural/hard-coded approach to implementing the rules of the enterprise.

2. While the concept of Business Rules has been around for nearly a decade, they appear to have suffered from a marketing/perception issue. These issues may lie with the targeted audience (in the past – IT professionals, in the future – Business Analysts) or technology (past reliance upon immature technologies such as AI and Expert Systems). The goal of this conference appeared to be to illustrate that Business Rules tools and concepts have matured and are ready for production-scale deployment. A secondary objective appeared to be to refocus the targeted audience to include Business Analysts, with several presentations discussing the need to "speak and support the language of the business, not the enabling technology".

3. Some of the vendors had some rather surprising opinions about the Business Rules space. Fair Isaac, a leading vendor and major sponsor of this show, have decided to "go vertical", focusing on opportunities within the Insurance and Healthcare industries. The representative I spoke to believed that opportunities in the Business Rules space are fairly limited for a horizontally-oriented player. This belief seems to mirror recent moves by traditionally "horizontal" EAI vendors such as Vitria and Mercator (both of whom have decided to focus on the Healthcare industry).

4. The OMG is in the process of redefining itself to better support the emerging Business Rules/business semantics space. OMG recognizes the apparent gaps (Zachman Rows 3 and 4) in reifying abstract business processes into technologies and is launching initiatives to try and fill these gaps.

Details

All presentations from the 6th Annual Business Rules Forum are available for download from the Business Rules Forum website at http://www.businessrulesforum.com/2003_Presentations.

I have hardcopies of tutorials and vendor materials.

The Expo Floor was fairly small, with 19 booths:

1. Sapiens (www.sapiens.com)
2. Computer Associates (www3.ca.com/Solutions/Product.asp?ID=262)
3. Business Rule Solutions (www.brsolutions.com)
4. Fair Isaac (www.fairisaac.com)
5. KPI (www.kpiusa.com)
6. Trinity Millennium Group (www.tringroup.com)
7. Pega Systems (www.pega.com)
8. ESI (www.esi-knowledge.com)
9. Computer Science Corp (www.csc.com/industries/insurance)
10. BizRules (www.bizrules.com)
11. EcomNets (www.ecomnets.com)
12. Business Rules Group (www.businessrulesgroup.org)
13. SoftLaw (www.softlawcorporation.com)
14. Transoft (www.transoft.com)
15. AMS (www.amsinc.com)
16. Yasu Technologies (www.yasutech.com)
17. Haley Enterprises (www.haley.com)
18. Allen Systems Group (www.asg.com)
19. RulesPower (www.rulespower.com)

Sunday

This day was devoted to Business Rules tutorials. There were two tutorials presented:

- "Enabling the Agile Enterprise" by Terry Moriarty, President,Inastrol/Conference Co-Chair.

    o This session provided a general introduction to the basic concepts of Business Rules and explained the benefits of adopting and deploying a Business Rules approach. The key benefit appears to be a more flexible ("agile") set of business processes. Developers build parameter-driven applications that accept commands and parameters from one or more sets of Business Rules designed and maintained by either Business Rules Specialists (a new niche appears to be emerging here) or Business Analysts/Domain Experts. Using Analysts/Domain Experts appears to be the preferred approach, but most of the tools that are currently available are still far too technical for the average business person. Business Rules Engines can be categorized as being either event-driven or data-driven (although some claim to do both). Most products currently on the market are event-driven. (Don Chapin, Ron Ross and others seem to believe that a data-driven approach provides a much more powerful and flexible rules engine.) According to Terry, vendors need to do a better job providing user-friendly tools for defining/building the corporate vocabulary and assembling this vocabulary into a set of robust, easily maintained yet highly scalable Business Rules.

- "Practice Made Perfect: A Business Rule Discovery and Analysis Workshop" by Barbara von Halle, President, KPI

    o I did not attend this session since I read Barbara's book ("Business Rules Applied") prior to attending the conference.

    o This tutorial explained the steps necessary to move from Business Rule Discovery to Analysis. A review of Barbara's STEP methodology (based on her book) was also included.

Monday

Day two of the Business Rules Forum was devoted to tutorials. There were four tutorials presented:

- "The Basics of Business Rules: Opening New Doors of Opportunity" by Ron Ross, Principal, Business Rule Solutions, LLC/Conference Co-Chair

    o The tutorial reviewed basic concepts and explained techniques related to Ron's "RuleSpeak" methodology. The following topics were also discussed:

        ▪ Concepts and Techniques of the Business Rule Approach
        ▪ Business Adaptability Through Business Rules
        ▪ Features and Deliverables of Business Rule Methodologies
        ▪ Organizing and Managing Business Rules
        ▪ Rethinking the Guidance Processes of the Enterprise
        ▪ Establishing the Rule Management Function

- "From Strategic Intent to Requirements Definition: A Method for Aligning Stakeholders, Processes and Rules" by Roger T. Burlton, Process Renewal Consulting Group Inc

    o Topics included:

        ▪ Real-world Implementations & Experiences: What Worked, Lessons Learned
        ▪ Techniques Used to Migrate to the Business Rules Approach
        ▪ Re-Engineering & Intelligent Business Processes
        ▪ Building Adaptable Applications
        ▪ Business Rule Methodology
        ▪ Business Rule Management and Repository
        ▪ The Role of Business Rules in Developing Business Strategy

- "Capturing the Language of the Business: The Foundation for Rule Expression, Data Definition and Knowledge Portals" by Don Chapin, Business Semantics Ltd, Business Vocabulary & Rules Consultant

    o Don explained the importance of leveraging industry standard terms, processes and taxonomies to vocabularies for rule creation.

- o Don also explained the need for a Business Semantics Repository to support:

    - Rules-based applications, databases and web services

    - Data warehouse and business intelligence

    - Message-based data integration (standardization, quality & transformation)

    - Textual information access using Knowledge Portals

- Fair Isaac sponsored a reception in the evening and conducted a tutorial based upon their products.

Tuesday

This was the first full day of the conference. There were approximately 300 people in attendance (I have not yet received the final count).

There were several breakout sessions available. I will only document those that I attended (see http://www.businessrulesforum.com/03_schedule.htm for the complete list of sessions).

- "Business Management Process Life Cycle" by Terry Moriarty, President, Inastrol and Forum Co-Chairperson

    - o A high-level presentation that illustrated the role of Business Rules in an overall business management process. The presentation also provided ideas for assessing how successful an implementation of Business Rules may have been. Guideline: "business rule effectiveness is assessed through the business intelligence environment using a data warehouse".

    - o Some of the motivations for business people to adopt business rules are: reduce dependence on the IT department and gain more control over their projects.

    - o A business rules management environment caters to several types of users: policy makers, business analysts, rules analysts, developers and line of business staff members. A business rules management environment is based upon a repository that supports documentation, rules enforcement, change management and deployment.

    - o Sample metrics for a business rules project were supplied.

- "Design Patterns for Advanced Business Rules" by Terry Halpin, Northface University, VP, Conceptual Modeling, Professor, and Dean of Graduate Program.

    - o Terry's presentation explained how to model temporal data using ORM. The majority of this presentation was focused on explaining ORM notation and its role in modeling facts, relationships and subtypes.

- "Smart Business Processes" by Roger Burlton, Process Renewal Consulting Group Inc.

  - Roger plugged the Business Process Management Group (BPMG), an international organization with well over 5,000 members.

  - Roger has a book from SAMS Publishing entitled "Business Process Management". Most of his presentation was based upon the contents of this book.

  - Emphasized the need for a robust rules repository (none of the vendors in this space seem to provide one). Without a robust rules repository, determining the impact of changing one or more rules is impossible.

  - BPM is a management process, not a technology (BPMS enables BPM, BPMS is not the same as BPM).

  - BPEL is the best bet for business process orchestration

- "Business Rules and Business Process – An Integrated Approach" by Neal McWhorter, President / Chief Architect, McWhorter Technology Management Inc.

  - Discussed relationships between Business Rules and business processes.

  - Brief history: IDEF is the "grandfather" of Business Rules – introduced the concept of decomposition. Business Processes are far too complicated for IDEF.

  - The Porter Value Chain is too weak to represent many industry needs.

  - Rules are decomposed into inferences, actions and algorithms.

  - Usage scenarios: Constraints, Atomic Activities (within a larger process) and Continuous Activities (long running processes).

  - Need to separate inferences from actions and algorithms to promote flexibility and reuse.

Wednesday

- "A Hitchhiker's Guide to the BRG's Business Rules Manifesto" by Ron Ross, Principal, Business Rule Solutions, LLC.

  - Keynote that discussed a "Business Rules Manifesto" – 26 guidelines for the use of Business Rules.

  - A copy of the manifesto is available at http://www.businessrulesgroup.org/brmanifesto.htm.

- "A Step-By-Step Guide to Writing Rules for BPM and BRE Tools" by Rolando Hernandez, BIZRULES.com, Founder & CEO, Chief Business Rules Architect.

- o Overview of Business Rules (procedural vs. declarative, BRE vendor review, business rules justification.

- "USALoan Network Technology Platform" by Gerard J. Heinz, USALoan Network, CIO

  - o A case study on the implementation of Business Rules at USALoan.

  - o Reviewed a rules-based application that provides workflow, risk based pricing, product selection, and eligibility guidelines for mortgage loan processing.

  - o Explained the benefits of combining business rules with workflow.

- "Business Rules, Data Quality and the Data Warehouse" by Bonnie O'Neil, Independent Consultant

  - o The presentation explained how Business Rules can be used to improve the quality of data available in a data warehouse.

- "The Rules Resurrection Is Upon Us" by James Sinur, Vice President, Gartner

  - o Talked about how rules can make our systems more flexible.

  - o BPM and rules is a lethal combination for enabling business change.

  - o Agility must be part of the "enterprise nervous system".

  - o Agility requires significant changes in management mindset and support for new technologies such as a distributed rule management system.

  - o Agility comes at a great cost for those who do not plan an infrastructure, flows and Web services with change in mind.

- "Emerging Standards for Business Rules" by Stan Hendryx, CEO, Hendryx & Assoc.

  - o Stan is chair of the OMG Business Rules SIG. This presentation explained the work that this group was doing and the related RFPs that have been released.

- "An Approach to Business Transformation utilizing Business Rule Technologies" by Donald Baisley, Unisys Rules Engine Architect and Peter Cunningham, Unisys Director of Architecture

  - o The presentation explained Unisys' Business Blueprints and how Business Rules can be used to generate software components to reify a Business Blueprint. (See http://www.unisys.com/services/enterprise__transformation/index.htm for specifics on Unisys Business Blueprints).

- I attended a meeting of the OMG Business Rules Working Group but had to leave early to catch a plane.