

Technical Product Marketing the SAP Way with Volker Haentjes

Introduction

[0:22] Kevin Benedict: Welcome to Deep Dive. I'm your host, Kevin Benedict, and I want to thank all of you for joining us today.

I'm excited to introduce our guest, Volker Haentjes. Thanks for joining us, Volker.

[0:37] Volker Haentjes: Thanks for having me, Kevin. Great to be here.

[0:40] Kevin: Volker is the Senior Director for Platform Product Marketing at SAP. I know that doesn't say a lot about the specific products you're focused on, but we'll jump into that and dig deeper later.

Before we do, where are you calling in from?

[0:57] Volker: I'm calling in from my home office near Walldorf, where SAP is headquartered. I used to work there quite a lot.

For this interview, though, this is a great place because nobody will disturb us.

[1:09] Kevin: I've been through Karlsruhe and that entire beautiful area. I always enjoy traveling there.

Hopefully, next year I'll get to attend SAP Ariba Live in Berlin as well.

[1:22] Volker: Yeah.

[1:25] Kevin: For those who don't know you, why don't you give us a little bit of your background, Volker?

[1:32] Volker: Sure, happy to.

I've been working for SAP for more than 25 years in various positions. I'm in my mid-50s, I'm married, and I have a son who's doing his master's studies at a technical university in Berlin.

In my private life, I'm a food blogger and singer. I also love cooking, wine and dining, and riding my e-bike with my lovely wife.

[2:02] Kevin: What's your favorite genre of music to sing?

[2:06] Volker: I sing in the men's choir here in my hometown. We sing everything from medieval church music to pop songs.

[2:16] Kevin: How fun. You sound like you'd be a lot of fun to hang out with.

[2:25] Volker: I do my best.

[2:28] Kevin: What does your average day look like, Volker? When you start work, whether you're at the office or working from home, what do you typically do?

[2:38] Volker: I work with a team that's completely abroad. The rest of the team is in North America, and I'm the representative here in Germany.

All of my work is virtual, so it doesn't really matter where I work from.

I really appreciate working from home because it's highly efficient. I also have a desk in Walldorf that I use for on-site meetings.

Our business is highly virtual, and I've found this to be a very effective way to work.

[3:10] Kevin: Absolutely. We're doing this interview virtually as well. Even my background is virtual, so we can definitely appreciate all those conveniences, can't we?

[3:21] Volker: Absolutely.

Section 1: From Complex Technology to Clear Product Stories

[3:23] Kevin: Volker, how did you end up in marketing?

[3:28] Volker: I haven't done this all my life at SAP. I actually started in roles across project management, business development, partner management, and solution management.

I tend to say I have an analytical mindset. I love end-to-end thinking, and I love making complex topics tangible.

I'm also very proud of SAP and its products and services. Since I'm a passionate writer, I thought product marketing brought all of those abilities together and gave me the opportunity to make it clear what SAP solutions can do for people.

It's really the best area and the best place for me to work.

[4:13] Kevin: Terrific. Tell us about your product area.

I know a lot of the products you cover start with the word HANA, and HANA can mean a lot of things, right? It can be an in-memory database, a brand, or a product.

Tell me what you're covering.

[4:33] Volker: When HANA was invented about 10 years ago, its first nickname was "Hasso's New Architecture" because it was a concept developed by Hasso Plattner at his institute in Potsdam.

The professional name became High-Performance Analytic Appliance.

In essence, it's an in-memory database and an in-memory application platform at the same time.

It's one of the biggest innovations SAP has developed in the last 10 years because it's now the platform for all of

our applications, as well as third-party applications.

It's an application development platform that can run all kinds of third-party solutions, and it brings together a multitude of recent innovations in the IT space.

It's still the only pure, in-memory-first database, and in many dimensions, it's a real-time database. It's available across multicloud and hybrid environments.

It can perform analytics and transactions in real time within the same system. It's a multitier database that can provide intelligent data management, process multimodel data, and bring structured and unstructured data together in the same system.

We often say SAP HANA democratizes in-memory computing because it makes it affordable and accessible to everyone.

That's essentially what it does.

[6:16] Kevin: Interesting. Volker, I remember the first year I was at SAPPHIRE when they started talking about HANA.

Hasso Plattner got up front and walked back and forth, telling people about this new innovation. Everybody was really interested, but they were scratching their chins because nobody understood it.

By the second year, there was more explanation and a lot more proofs of concept being demonstrated.

By the third year, everybody was talking about HANA.

It was really fun for me to attend every year and see the progression—how the product was introduced and matured over time. So, good job on the marketing there.

[7:03] Volker: That's why I love technology and platform marketing. It's about taking new innovations that nobody understands at first, making them understandable and transparent, and breaking them down into benefits for regular users and the average person.

That's a big task, and it's also in line with SAP's purpose. As you may know, we say we want to help the world run better and improve people's lives.

Breaking down the technology and seeing, for example, how environmental protection organizations can use our software to help save animals is something that really makes me proud.

[7:48] Kevin: Absolutely.

Section 2: SAP HANA: Data, Security, and Real-Time Intelligence

[7:50] Kevin: If we look at the product list at SAP, we're going to see HANA in front of a lot of different products. But you're focused on some specific areas.

Talk to us about the products within your area of responsibility.

[8:05] Volker: Sure. HANA is a huge platform, and of course, it can't be managed by a single person.

We're a team of eight people, and together with a colleague, I cover the core database topics, including all the different dimensions of storage and data management.

My specific area is SAP HANA security, including both data security and application security.

One particularly exciting topic we're working on is data anonymization. It's SAP's response to recent data privacy regulations such as GDPR and, in the American healthcare sector, HIPAA.

It's an innovative way to analyze data that is actually private. Regulations place restrictions on how private data can be used, but by anonymizing it through sophisticated methods, you can still derive meaningful business value from that data.

The algorithms we use are recognized by the EU as sufficient to safeguard data privacy. We're actually the first major business database provider to implement and embed this capability directly into our platform.

We're quite proud of that.

[9:25] Kevin: Who are the target markets for your product lines, Volker?

[9:31] Volker: First of all, our target market includes customers already running SAP solutions.

But we also target anyone looking to run data-aware and data-centric applications in real time. That includes applications that need to process streaming data from IoT devices, implement machine learning algorithms, perform predictive analytics, or handle blockchain transactional processing.

SAP HANA is the platform for all of those use cases. That may sound bold, but it's simply true.

If you look at the deployment models we provide, you can run HANA in your on-premises data center. You can even get a free version to run on your personal computer for programming and development.

You can also run it across our cloud partners' hyperscale environments or within SAP's private cloud.

[10:38] Kevin: As a professional marketer, when you're targeting audiences for these products, are you speaking to CIOs? Are you targeting database administrators? Who do you spend most of your time with?

[10:54] Volker: All of them, actually.

CIOs consume our content when they're looking to adjust their long-term IT strategy and understand the business benefits of HANA.

Database administrators are keen to understand how to work with SAP HANA, what makes it most efficient and cost-effective, and how they can optimize it to meet business requirements.

Of course, we also create a lot of content for salespeople who want to understand how best to approach customers and clearly communicate the benefits of SAP HANA.

Section 3: How Product Marketing Is Evolving Beyond Technology

[11:35] Kevin: You've been at SAP for 25 years. You've been working in marketing for a good portion of that time, and you have a lot of background and experience with HANA.

How have you seen marketing content requirements change, Volker? Are you creating the same content today that you did 10 years ago, or are you doing more videos and podcasts?

How has that changed for you as a marketer?

[12:00] Volker: It's changed a lot.

I think 10 or 20 years ago, it was just about technology. You explained that your solution ran on the latest chipsets, presented the latest features, and then you were done.

But that's totally different today.

First of all, I would say purpose beats technology. People want to understand

the purpose of a solution. How does it help them? How does it make their lives and daily tasks better, more affordable, more efficient, and easier to manage?

That's what we need to make transparent. Our job is to clearly communicate how SAP benefits regular people. SAP isn't only about B2B business. It's also about the individual—the person at the front desk working with SAP solutions.

Today, it's much more about social content and video. Content needs to be more focused and eye-catching, leveraging KPIs and other key information.

Storytelling is also incredibly important. People want to be entertained; they don't just want to consume information.

That's changing our work significantly.

[13:17] Kevin: I can share an example, Volker. I've been reading several books on blockchain, one after another. Then I went to YouTube and watched a number of videos on blockchain.

Those videos helped me visually understand some of the concepts that were difficult to grasp through text alone.

By combining the two—watching introductory videos and then going back to the books—I found myself thinking, "Oh, that's what they were talking about."

I can definitely appreciate the different ways people learn and the value of

combining those formats to create an optimal learning environment.

Very interesting.

Section 4: The Experience Economy and the Power of Real-Time Data

[13:59] Kevin: I've been to a lot of events, especially during this conference season. Over the last three months, I think I've attended four different SAP conferences.

At those conferences, I've heard a lot about the experience economy, customer experience, and this broader focus on experience.

How is that discussion impacting your area of the business?

[14:26] Volker: After the cloud, this is probably one of the most disruptive developments affecting SAP's business today.

When you expand into the cloud, you can't ignore the experience economy because things become much more reactive. You're in much closer contact with your customers, and you need to understand them better than ever before.

You need customer buy-in from the beginning, and customers can easily leave if you don't meet their requirements or deliver on your promises.

You need to understand very specifically what your customers' requirements are and how they feel about using your products.

Ideally, you want to incorporate that input from the very beginning, even during the design phase. When we apply our design thinking methodology, that's mission-critical.

From a data management and processing perspective, there's also X and O data, as we call it.

[15:24] Kevin: X for experience. I've got that down—X and O, right?

[15:29] Volker: Yeah. Our co-CEO, Bill, is promoting that end to end.

I also think it's the perfect use case for data management because it brings together structured and unstructured data.

Ideally, you want to manage that data in real time to get value from it, and you need an in-memory database to do that.

Consider what that means for HANA, with all of this technology embedded. It serves as an application and business platform that can manage all of this data, including experience data, and map it to your business data in real time within the same system.

It's probably the most efficient way to do that. I tend to be bold and say only HANA can do it this way.

[16:13] Kevin: Very interesting.

Section 5: The Future of Context-Aware Product Marketing

[16:16] Kevin: Let me wrap things up today, Volker, with a question that requires you to put on your future hat.

[16:23] Volker: Yes.

[16:24] Kevin: How do you anticipate product marketing will continue to evolve over the next three to five years?

What do you think will be different if we come back and talk about this five years from now?

[16:38] Volker: I think this is one of the areas where experience data will have the greatest impact.

As we understand our customers better, we'll increasingly be able to approach them on an individual, context-aware basis.

Of course, we're still doing broad campaign marketing today, but I think we'll become much better at getting closer to individual customer needs and telling them exactly what they need to understand about how SAP solutions can benefit their business.

We'll also be able to do this in a more automated way.

With the machine learning environments available today, systems can continue to optimize, learn, and automate processes. This will help us better understand how to approach customers and map business content to the right marketing content.

I think this will have a huge impact. I'm really looking forward to seeing how this evolves over the next five years, and I'd love to be part of it.

[17:39] Kevin: Great. Volker, thank you so much for joining us right before the weekend starts in Germany.

Thank you for giving us your time and sharing your expertise with all of us.

[17:52] Volker: You made my week, Kevin. It was a pleasure. Thank you so much.

[17:55] Kevin: You're welcome.

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