

Interview with Tracy Smith

by Gert ter Burg



I recently had the pleasure of interviewing Tracy Smith, the Product Manager for Novell Teaming. A man with quite a history with Novell, who has great ideas and a great passion for a product that is at the heart of the Novell Open Collaboration Architecture.

- **Q: Can you introduce yourself? How long have you been with Novell?**

A: I have been with Novell for over 19 years. I originally started with WordPerfect. For the first 9 years I was part of the documentation group as a software engineer building automation tools. I worked extensively with XML, SGML and PostScript. I spent the next 9 years in Novell Support managing support programs. Originally I managed a project called LogicSource, then the Support Connection CD, Software Evaluation Library and AppNotes. Soon after this we introduced Novell Technical Subscriptions. I then managed all Technical Self-Service options which included the Support web site and forums. In the last two years in Support I was responsible for the Global Support programs. This included Novell Premium Service and the support benefits provided through Novell product maintenance. For just over a year now I have been the Product Manager for Novell Teaming,

- **Q: How do you know the Open Horizons Community?**

A: Soon after becoming Product Manager for Novell Teaming, I was introduced to some members of Open Horizons and I have recently participated in one of the

regional events. This is a great community and I appreciate greatly the dedication and the work they do. I look forward to seeing it grow and supporting that growth.

- **Q: What makes you a happy man in your life other than Novell?**

A: That is a simple question to answer, my family. I have been married for over 20 years and have three kids. My wife was born in Scotland but lived in many places throughout Europe and the U.S. I have worked for Novell almost the entire time we have been married, so Utah is our home. When I go home, I hang out with the family. I love spending time with my kids and watching them grow up and experience life's challenges and joys. We enjoy movies on Saturdays and going on family trips to amusement parks and riding roller coasters.

- **Q: How do you use Teaming?**

A: I use Teaming in a number of ways: Firstly for team collaboration. I am involved in many projects and Teaming is an effective tool to share information in many ways to the various teams. These teams mostly use wikis, discussions and file sharing. I use the new Relevance Dashboard to keep up on what's new and changing. I also subscribe to many workspaces and get notified via email when there are changes.

Secondly I use it for Knowledge capture. We have a workspace I use to capture ideas on how to improve Teaming from our sales organisation. A sales person can go into this workspace and create a new entry

on an idea. The rest of the team members can see that idea and comment on the entry. The ideas are then prioritised with other feedback and influence the direction of Teaming. There are many other workspaces that provide similar benefits for other topics/projects and people.

Thirdly I manage a small group of people. I ask that every day they create a blog entry on what they have done. I track their blogs and can easily see a summary of their work on the Relevance Dashboard. When I travel, or I am in many meetings, I find this to be an affective way to keep up on my team's progress and give them feedback.

Additionally we recently did a project internally that required people to register in order to participate in an activity. We used Teaming forms and a workflow to facilitate the registration process and track participation.

- **Q: How do you think people use Teaming?**

A: I have visited many customers and partners and I find they use Teaming in four ways. Since Teaming can do so many different things, the details of how it is used can vary greatly between customers. However this is how I would summarise what I have seen:

Knowledge Repository: Customers use the flexibility of the customisable secure workspaces and all the information types supported in Teaming to capture and retain knowledge. The main information types are

files (over 300 types are supported), wiki, blog, discussion groups, tasks and calendars. Custom information types can easily be created to capture information and meta data unique to an organisation.

Document Management: Teaming includes automatic document versioning out of the box and this works great for many customers. If a customer needs more customised document management, the custom forums and workflows can be leveraged to do very simple additions or even complex document management.

Process Automation: Teaming contains a powerful workflow engine. The workflow is independent of documents and Customers leverage this to do all types of automation processes. Process automation is usually not the initial reason for buying Teaming but this capability is quickly discovered. We have recently introduced the Teaming Library which contains many examples of forms and workflows.

Project Collaboration: Effectively sharing information on projects is a common problem most customers seem to be dealing with. I see many customers using Teaming to manage and share all the information on a project. Workspaces are created with public areas so the entire organisation can see progress and participate if needed. Also multiple private areas within a workspace are used for project members that need to restrict access to files or information.

- **Q: How do you think GroupWise using people use Teaming?**

A: I would say in the same ways that I mentioned above. The one difference is that these customers expect tight integrations between Teaming and GroupWise. We are aware of this need and have made it a priority. Soon there will be synchronising of GroupWise and Teaming calendars and tasks followed by integrations on search, email sharing, document sharing, contact and much more.

- **Q: The new version of Teaming is out. What are the qualities of the new version?**

The best improvement that users will see in Teaming 2 is the new user experience. It's significantly improved from Teaming 1 and the overall experience is much faster. I think the new capabilities like the Relevance Dashboard, ability to easily track people and places, Landing Pages, Guest User access and branded workspaces will be greatly used and appreciated by users. We have also done some improvements for the IT staff to make installation, scaling, and administration better.

- **Q: How do you think Teaming can gain more market share in the future?**

A: Teaming is unique in the diversity of information types that can be managed, the customisability for managing information and its powerful workflow capability. I am not aware of any competitors that bring all these capability in one package at the same cost.

Teaming is by definition about team collaboration - not just about web pages and file sharing. As we leverage these capabilities, continue to make them easier to use and integrate them with tools people use, I expect to see strong growth.

- **Q: Why should users of competitive solutions consider using Teaming instead?**

A: I've already mentioned the diversity of informational types that can be leveraged in one place along with the powerful workflow functionality.

When this is added to Novell's Security, Identity and Compliance capabilities that are part of the Novell Open Collaboration Architecture, I think that will be very compelling.

In the end, customers will have a better collaboration solution, at a lower cost of ownership.

- **Q: Do you have a migration path for this?**

A: Yes, we are already working on migration tools for other collaboration solutions.

- **Q: What is going to be the future of Teaming?**

A: Teaming will be focused on 3 priorities over the next couple of years: Improving the user experience, integrating with Novell products and integrating with 3rd party products. We're also moving to shorter smaller release cycles. This will help us address the priorities more quickly and allow us to act on market changes and developments quickly. From the business perspective, Teaming will become a more effective collaboration platform that helps companies save money and communicate more effectively while reducing complexity in the IT environment. IT Complexity is reduced as collaboration tools can be consolidated to Teaming.

The area that for me needs to get addressed quickly is enabling Teaming to more effectively connect to the file system and the files I'm use to working with offline. The best feature is how so many different informational types can easily and effectively be stored and managed in one place. The power behind improving people's ability to communicate, share and manage information and files is very cool. In the end I tend to focus most on where we need to improve and what improvements are the highest priorities.

- **Q: Can we see you on presentations such as the Novell Collaboration Strategy with Kent Erickson and Ken Muir?**

A: Kent and Ken are the main leads for presentation like that.

- **Q: Can we see you on the EMEA Summit?**

A: I expect to be at the EMEA summit.

Tracy, thanks a lot for this interview.