

NESUG-2010 Report **(Parag Shiralkar, eClinical Solutions)**

Although I have attended SAS user group conferences such as SAS Global Forum, and PharmaSUG many times in past, this is the first time I attended NESUG. Earlier, some of my colleagues mentioned that it's not worth attending this conference. However, I had a completely different experience. I found that this year's NESUG was very well organized and had lot of good presentations.

Keynote presentation: This presentation on social media was delivered by David Thomas. It was an interesting presentation explaining why SAS programmers should be aware of social media, and how SAS programmers should maximize the benefits of social media. Some of the good tips he shared are as follows:

- **Learn- Experience- Apply- Enlighten:** Learn new social media techniques, get more experienced with them, apply them to boost your personal and business marketing, and then help others to maximize such benefits.
- **Stay connected:** David shared an example that many companies do rigorous search of qualified SAS programmers. However, these social media marketing sites and techniques facilitate quick availability of resource within the area.
- **Cautious use of social media:** User may expose his/her limitations/weaknesses to the wider audience on Internet. Cautious use of social media is highly recommended.

Think of the analogy of social media with your cell phone. If you have a cell phone but don't share that number with anyone else, then you may not understand the importance of the cell phone. Social media is similar to that. Having an account at a social media site but not being active there will not reveal to you the importance of having such a social media presence.

SAS Solutions Center:

There was a room dedicated to a SAS Solutions Center. It comprised 'SAS Technical Support', 'SAS Training and Education', 'SAS Community.org', and 'SAS Publishing'. I was really hoping to see some demos of SAS products here. But this center was more dedicated to training and tech support. There were quite a few interesting books I saw (including the one by David Thomas on social media). Mike Molter (our NESUG liaison) also wrote a book on Output Delivery System. Some of the unusual books I saw were related to 'Six Sigma Modeling', and 'Performance Management' using SAS. This shows how wide SAS is trying to reach in terms of application development.

Posters:

Overall posters were very knowledge intensive. But I felt that the organization of these posters was a bit un-clear. This year, NESUG received and accepted a lot of posters and divided them for representation in two days. A division of posters based on relevant topics could have been a better option to present these posters.

LUG Panel Discussion:

Under management session, John Cohen from PhilaSUG, (who also happened to be a session chair for management session this year) organized a panel discussion of local user group representatives. This panel included, SUGME (SAS User Group of Maine), BASUG (Boston area SAS user group), TASS (Toronto area), and PhilaSUG (Philadelphia area). I represented our user group. Michael Davis coordinated this session. Some of the experiences shared by LUG representatives were as follows:

- **Challenges:** Most of the challenges faced by each user group are pretty similar.
 - Ensuring involvement of new generation of SAS users
 - Getting right kind of speakers which can attract attendees
 - Identifying organizations which would host the meeting
 - Getting an active steering committee.
 - Cancellation/changes of meetings because of weather and timely communication of such changes to attendees.

- **Support:** Each user group seems to be happy about the support provided by NESUG as well as by SAS Institute.

- **Successes:** Some of the user groups shared the following key reasons for successful operation of user group:
 - Having a group of dedicated steering committee members who take responsibilities for successful functioning of group.
 - Industry interaction, sponsorship and patronage for operation.
 - Having long time affiliates with the user group
 - Getting topics which can draw attendance.
 - Having strong code of conduct

- **Use of Social Media:** Since this was one of the prominent themes of this conference, there was some discussion about if any of the LUG uses social media. Aside from TASS, all other user groups do not seem to use the social media. But this is something each LUG may explore. Some of the examples for need of use of social media that were shared in this panel discussion were as follows:
 - Using the social media for hiring SAS programmers local in the area
 - Communicating the latest updates regarding upcoming meeting through social media- mostly LinkedIn.
 - Conducting polls and having blogs to see interests about topics that could be used for further meetings- mostly LinkedIn and Twitter
 - Share the knowledge and interests with local SAS users as well as users from other LUGs to identify speakers.

Papers/Presentations:

Although I spent the majority of my time in 'management' and 'pharma applications' sections, some of the papers and presentations which caught my attention were as follows:

- 1) Benchmarking techniques to identify best practices in SAS®: Although from title it sounds more like a management topic, major focus of this topic is on the performance qualification of SAS®. This paper and presentation talks a lot about using the SAS® in an optimum way to utilize system resources.
- 2) SAS® E-mail Data Driven Application: Very nice paper and concept which can increase efficiency of communication. This paper talks about efficient distribution of SAS query results through e-mail.
- 3) SAS® Enterprise Guide® Its for programming too: This is part of the hands on workshop and explains how Enterprise Guide® can be used to do custom coding.
- 4) Survey Analysis- Options for missing data: This is another nice paper discussing more about the survey analysis and use of different options of survey procedures.
- 5) Six Sigma in Programming- Although this paper discusses a case study of Six Sigma implementation in clinical programming, it's worth reviewing and the concept can be applicable in the non-pharma world too.

There were many good papers/manuscripts and presentations for beginners as well as for advanced users of SAS®. All these papers are available at official website of NESUG (at <http://www.nesug.org>).

From a knowledge sharing and networking point of view, it was a very good event and I would strongly recommend SAS® users to attend.