If you know someone who you think would benefit from being an Insider, feel free to forward this PDF to them so they can sign up here.

Quick Tips for our Insider friends!

Hey Insiders!

This bi-weekly Quick Tips is coming from London where we've just finished our IE1 on Internals and Performance. Jonathan and Joe flew in on Saturday and we're all teaching our IE2 on Performance Tuning to a sell-out crowd of 40 people – with 70% of them having already taken IE1 this year or last year. It's going to be a blast! We're hanging out in London for a few days after the class to do some sightseeing – Jonathan and I are huge history buffs and we're *really* looking forward to investigating all the famous tombs in Westminster Abbey.

During May we're offering you a ***Spring Cleaning special deal***. For new customers from anywhere in the world, we'll give you one of our flagship SQL Server Health Checks for a flat fee of $1300 (covering a health check of one SQL Server instance (SQL Server 2005+) up to a maximum of 6 hours), which is a saving of 33% off the regular price. You can get all the details of what's involved here.

The most recent book I've read is Alan Greenspan's *The Age of Turbulence*. It was extremely interesting, especially after having read Niall Ferguson's *The Ascent of Money* while we were teaching in Tampa earlier this year. Greenspan has played an important role in world finance for long time and offers great insight into the workings of the Federal Reserve, characteristics of the various Presidents he's worked for, and analysis of the financial situations and futures of many countries around the world. One of the most interesting things he pointed out was the lack of superb math teachers in the US – and how that is hampering generations from being more fiscally aware and responsible. I strongly recommend the book, no matter what your politics are.

Please let us know if you liked what you read/saw here and/or have any suggestions for future Quick Tips.

Note: you can get all the prior Insider newsletters here.

Jon's Ponderings

(This time Jonathan wanted to write for the newsletter so in a departure from normal, we have Jon's Ponderings instead of Paul's Ponderings – enjoy!)

Every time I watch the movie The Replacements I'm reminded about a topic I've intended to write about repeatedly but I never get around to actually doing it. In the movie, during a locker room meeting, the head coach asks the players what they are afraid of. After a number of players mention off-the-wall topics like spiders and bees, the quarterback says that he is afraid of quicksand. The explanation behind this in the movie has always been something that has

resonated with me in my career because I can easily look back and see points in time where quicksand got the best of me. In this case quicksand is a metaphor, it describes a situation where something has gone wrong that is out of your control and no matter how hard you fight, things just continue to go wrong until you are sinking, just like quicksand.

It is really easy to get trapped in quicksand in IT, and a lot of times it is the result of not having an alternate plan to fall back on should your original plan not work out. I can remember early on in my career as a DBA when I was performing one of my first upgrades from SQL Server 2000 to SQL Server 2005. I had a complete upgrade plan that had been tested repeatedly inside of our test environment using restored copies of the databases on multiple SQL Server 2000 installations that I had built, upgraded in place, rebuilt, restored the databases, upgraded in place again, and then repeated until I had a complete set of upgrade steps that were necessary and I had a rock-solid plan based on testing. This all seemed great until the night that I was actually performing the upgrade on the production server and it failed.

A failed upgrade on its own isn't really a disaster, these things happen, and at this point I had practiced installing and setting up a duplicate copy of this SQL Server repeatedly, except I did that during the day when I had access to the installer media and the server in our data center to be able to drop the CD in the CD-ROM drive. Since I hadn't planned on this upgrade failing, I never considered possibly pre-staging the necessary installation media where I could access it to rebuild the server. At this time I also didn't have direct access to our data center or to the installation media (which was locked in a cabinet in our CTO's office) so I had to coordinate with a member of the server team – first to get access to the installer disks and then to get access to the data center. Now it was time to hit the phone tree for the server admins and see if one of them would meet me at the office to bail me out of this problem I'd created.

Two and a half hours later my frantic voice mails were finally returned by a our Senior Server Admin, who promptly asked why I didn't copy the installer files from the test server I had been working with the last two weeks. In the ensuing panic that followed the upgrade failure I never even thought about alternate locations for the installer media, like the test server I had been using where we copied the installer files to the local disk to keep from having to ferry the CD back and forth to the CTO's office every time I reinstalled SQL Server 2000 on the machine to test the upgrade again. By only planning for the upgrade I had actually left myself wide open to falling into quicksand, and I've repeatedly seen smart people make stupid mistakes in my IT career while engrossed in the ensuing panic that occurs when they don't have an alternate plan for when something goes wrong.

This upgrade taught me a number of lessons about planning and preparing, not for the correct outcome but instead for the worst case scenarios if something goes wrong. Having something break at some point in your IT career is inevitable, a failure becoming a total disaster is not.   A good example of this is disaster recovery strategy planning for your environment. A number of companies have thought about their disaster recovery requirements and have a remote data center that has servers, possibly a SAN that is replicated to, but at least copies of the data and applications ready to run with minimized downtime if necessary in a major disaster at their primary location. However, few companies I've talked to have ever considered what they would do if both data centers were lost to a single event, a disaster that happened on September 11,

2001 when the World Trade Center collapsed since many business had a primary data center in Tower 1 and their DR data center was in Tower 2. If a scenario like this happened today would you be prepared to recover from it? Some questions to think about for this scenario include:

- Can you purchase new hardware and how long will it take to be delivered?
- Is it possible to have a lease agreement pre-established with guaranteed delivery SLAs if needed?
- How long does it take to configure bare-metal installations of your environment from the ground up?
- Where are your backups located?
- How long does it take to get access to them?
- How long to restore?
- If you need network access or network routing how are you going to accomplish this?

From these seven questions alone, you are likely thinking about a number of failure points that you've possibly never considered before, and these haven't even scratched the surface of all the problems that need to be addressed for business continuity planning.

Call to Action: Consider the potential failure points in your day-to-day activities and your operational environment that could easily turn into quicksand should something go wrong, and then formulate a plan ahead of time for how to deal with those potential failures. Then go back and consider what could fail in your alternative plan and how to deal with those as well.

(Back to Paul again…) I'm really interested to know your thoughts on preventing the quicksand scenario—feel free to drop me a line, confidentially as always.

Video Demo

Instead of recording a video this week (as we're teaching) I'm going to point you at another of the MCM videos we recorded for Microsoft at the end of 2010. This one is by me and is a demo of looking at wait statistics using the code I published later in this blog post.

The video is 16 minutes long and you can get it in a variety of formats here.

Enjoy!

SQLskills Offerings

We've extended our "buy in bulk" discount where you pre-pay a block of seats now to get a 28% discount off of full price and a 16% off of the early-bird price. See here for details. You can even use these "buy in bulk" seats for classes that no longer offer the early-bird price as long as they are not "sold-out."

Here's our complete 2012 schedule of classes. We're not adding anything else for 2012 but we are planning our 2013 calendar. It was a tough decision as we truly enjoy delivering these and meeting so many great SQL folks, but our schedule is just too full. With the holidays, Fall conferences such as SQL Connections and SQL PASS, and other engagements and projects on our schedule, we just can't add more business travel to our 2012 calendar.

- August 6-10, 2012: Internals and Performance (**IE1**) in Bellevue, WA – USA
- August 13-17, 2012: Performance Tuning (**IE2**) in Bellevue, WA – USA
- August 13-17, 2012: Immersion Event for Developers (**IEDev**) in Bellevue, WA – USA
- August 20-24, 2012: High Availability & Disaster Recovery (**IE3**) in Bellevue, WA – USA
- August 20-24, 2012: Immersion Event for Business Intelligence (**IEBI**) in Bellevue, WA – USA
- August 27-31, 2012: Development Support (**IE4**) in Bellevue, WA – USA

We hope to see you in Bellevue later this year; otherwise we'll plan to see you in 2013! As a note for 2013, we're currently planning our locations and we're looking at coastal locations (one on the east and one on the west) as well as our Chicago location for domestic events. And, we're likely to head back to London as well. We're planning to release our 2013 calendar in August/September.

As a note for those of you who really want us to come to *your* city… we'd LOVE to. However, we just can't be everywhere (we wish we could! ☺). Having said that though, these events are truly *immersion* events and if there isn't one in your city, it might be a good thing to consider the travel and time away. Being in a hotel for the event allows you to participate in evening events, network with your colleagues and focus on the class without the usual requirements of being in your hometown.

To make it easier on you, we work hard to book with hotels where the nightly sleeping costs are reasonable, where you won't need a rental car and in hub cities where flights are cheaper (i.e. Chicago/London/San Francisco/Charlotte). Our Bellevue/Seattle courses are a bit of a departure from this as it's not a major hub city but we balance that with the fact that it's during the summer and many of our past attendees have combined their visit with summer family travel. August in the Pacific Northwest is absolutely stunning and we can give you all sorts of recommendations for sight-seeing if you're interested!

So, that's it for now. Our 2012 schedule is final and we're really looking forward to some great Immersion Events this year as well as planning for 2013. We hope to see you soon!

See here for all the details.

Summary

We hope you've enjoyed this issue - we really enjoy putting these together.

If there is anything else you're interested in, we'd love to hear from you - drop us a line.

Thanks,
Paul and Kimberly

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