

Titel:

Low-Code at High Pressure: How Oracle APEX is Shaping the Future of App Development

Intro:

Simon Hunt has been working with Oracle APEX for over 20 years, developing systems for defence and leading international teams. In this interview, he talks about AI, cloud, security - and a rollercoaster.

Hello Simon. You've been using Oracle APEX since 2003. What was your first impression of the platform, and how has that evolved over the past two decades?

I'll never forget the first time I saw Oracle APEX – it was genuinely jaw-dropping. I couldn't believe how intuitive it was and how easily I could build applications with it. For weeks afterward, I'd arrive at the office early just to spend some quiet time exploring APEX before the workday began. That sense of excitement hasn't changed much over the years. Even now, I often find myself building apps and experimenting with new techniques late into the night. APEX continues to evolve, but its core appeal – powerful simplicity – remains as strong as ever.

Your keynote at APEX Connect 2025 focuses on APEX Product Management Updates. Can you give us a sneak peek into the innovations you're most excited to showcase?

Absolutely – it's all about AI. Both Oracle and APEX are strategically focused on delivering AI-powered tools and capabilities, constantly exploring new ways to enhance both the developer and user experience. At APEX World, Mike Hichwa offered a glimpse into something we've been working on: a new domain-specific language called *APEX Lang*, designed for defining low-code applications. It's a game-changer – not only for enabling CI/CD and building apps in VS Code but also for what it makes possible next. With APEX Lang, the vision is to eventually allow complex applications to be built using natural language. While “natural language to application” is still in its early days, the potential is enormous, and the APEX team is committed to being at the forefront of this exciting space.

Having led a major migration from a private cloud to Oracle Cloud Infrastructure, what were the biggest technical or organizational hurdles, and how did you overcome them?

Before joining Oracle, I served as the solution architect for a major UK youth organization. During the COVID lockdowns, we took the opportunity to migrate to Oracle Cloud Infrastructure (OCI), knowing downtime would have minimal impact. However, as early adopters of Autonomous Database on OCI, we encountered some first-generation challenges. Two significant hurdles stood out. First, time zone discrepancies – one

environment was set to Europe/London, while ATP used UTC. Second, finding a cloud-based print engine to replace our on-premises BI Publisher setup.

The time zone issue threatened the integrity of our audit logs, but we resolved it by switching from SYSDATE to CURRENT_DATE, aligning timestamps correctly. For reporting, we adopted APEX Office Print (AOP) from United Codes, which met and exceeded our needs. Interestingly, both challenges have since been addressed in OCI: you can now configure the database time zone, and Oracle Analytics Cloud (Classic) can serve as a print engine for BI Publisher templates in APEX.

You've supported over 30 production applications for UK Defence. What role do security and scalability play in designing APEX apps for such high-stakes environments?

As you'd expect, security is the top priority in the Defence sector – it's non-negotiable. Scalability depends more on the specific use case and deployment model, but it's inherently supported by the Oracle Database. What I particularly appreciate about APEX is how it allows developers to easily leverage the enterprise-grade security capabilities of the Oracle Database. Combined with excellent static analysis tools like APEXSec and APEX-SERT, it becomes much easier to validate and maintain secure applications.

The APEX community is known for being collaborative and ego-free. How has that shaped your own professional development and contributions?

When I started with APEX in 2004, I didn't have formal software engineering qualifications or much experience. That made it difficult to establish credibility and led to a fair bit of self-doubt – classic imposter syndrome. The APEX community made all the difference. It provided validation, encouragement, and a sense of belonging that helped me persevere. Since then, I've earned formal qualifications, including a Master's degree, and I'm now in a position to give back to the same community that once supported me.

At the Oracle APEX Roadshow, you explored new features in APEX 24.1 and beyond. Which generative AI enhancements do you believe will be most transformative for developers in 2025?

Without a doubt, vector search configurations will be the most transformative. They bring semantic understanding to your data, enabling applications to move beyond basic keyword matching and grasp true meaning and context. This is also the most effective way to enable AI to interact with enterprise data using Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG), which significantly boosts relevance and accuracy.

As a reservist with 28 years of service and a tech leader, how has military discipline influenced your approach to software architecture and agile project delivery?

There are many misconceptions about military leadership. In my experience, it's about leading by example – demonstrating loyalty, integrity, and selfless commitment. I believe strongly in servant leadership: empowering teams through clear communication, mutual respect, and disciplined execution. These principles align

closely with Agile leadership, which is why I think individuals with military backgrounds often excel in leading high-performing Agile teams.

You've spoken at multiple international events. What differences have you observed in how global APEX communities approach low-code development?

In my experience, the differences are more organizational than geographical. Approaches to low-code development largely depend on the strategic vision and openness of IT leadership. Unfortunately, some leaders still hold onto outdated perceptions, missing out on major productivity gains, cost savings, and low maintenance advantages. Many also lack a full understanding of the nuances within the low-code landscape – nuances that are crucial for choosing the right technology and vendor.

You've emphasized test-driven and data-driven development. How can teams adopt these strategies more effectively in fast-paced, low-code environments?

Many teams haven't yet embraced modern testing practices, but there are no shortcuts – testing must be a core part of a comprehensive QA strategy. This includes peer reviews, unit tests, user acceptance testing, code scanning, exploratory testing, automated browser tests, and performance/load testing. While browser automation provides full-stack testing, it's often expensive, slow, and brittle. Agile delivery requires automation, so teams must create robust test strategies that balance investment in tools and processes with risk.

Looking ahead beyond APEX Connect, what's your vision for Oracle APEX in 2026? How do you see the role of developers evolving with it?

My vision for 2026 is to see more powerful and accessible AI capabilities available for both developers and end users. If 2024 was the year of Generative AI, and 2025 is shaping up to be the year of Agentic AI, then perhaps 2026 will be the year of Generative Development (GenDev) – where AI moves from assisting developers to actually building and evolving complex applications from natural language, with little or no developer intervention.

Have you ever been to Europa-Park, and will you be riding the coasters at APEX Connect in Rust? Are there similar parks in the UK with conference facilities?

The last roller coaster I dared to ride was the Velociraptor at Paultons Park with my son – and it gave me vertigo for three months! So this time, you'll find me at the bumper cars, the ice cream stands, and maybe braving the log flume – keeping things fun, but well within my limits.

Thank you very much.