

# Oracle's APEX Enhancements & Database 21c Release Continue Progress on its Magnum Opus

by Mark Peters, on Jan 14, 2021

Sometimes vendors focus on the *integration* of their abilities, while sometimes they emphasize *improvements* to those abilities. Oracle's announcements today – the free-standing, cloud-based delivery of its APEX low-code application development tool, as well as the 21c “innovation” release of its eponymous database – do both.

Let's briefly cover what was announced before commenting on what it all means.

“**It's something that lets you declaratively build your applications without coding.**”

- **Oracle's overall database strategy** remains that of convergence. In today's announcement, Andy Mendelsohn (Oracle's EVP of Database Server Technologies) used the deceptively simple – but also rather good – analogy of smartphones. Whereas we used to have multiple devices (phones, cameras, text messaging, GPS systems etc.), smartphones converged them for ease, economy, and productivity. Said Mendelsohn, “the notion of converged database is exactly the same; we are converging lots of different database technologies that heretofore had been in separate databases... into one single database that we call [a] converged database.” \*
- **Oracle Database 21c** is simply the latest turn (actually, some 200 individual enhancement turns!) of its converged database screw, further enhancing the ability for different models and different workloads to all play nicely together... for ease, economy, and productivity. There are myriad improvements; some (such as tamper-proof blockchain abilities and the use of persistent memory) being so valuable that they are being “back-ported” into 19c, which is Oracle's most recent long-term database release.
- **APEX is a low-code development tool** that has been around (aka refined, proven, and ruggedized) for more than 15 years, garnering – according to Oracle – north of 500,000 developer users along the way. Using Mendelsohn's succinct summary, “it's something that lets you declaratively build your applications without coding.” Its speed and ease is why it's the foundation, he said, for over 6,000 new applications every day! The power of Oracle APEX is now available as a browser-based, standalone service in Oracle Cloud Infrastructure.

So, what does Oracle want you to take away from its announcements?

- **Well, clearly, it's full steam ahead** on the converged database strategy, a marked difference from the multiple specialized, single-use databases—that make data sharing difficult and costly—typically proffered by its competitors, a group led, of course, by AWS (and it must be noted that the cross-corporation jabs and jibes make each vendor's events highly gratifying to behold!). Oracle's converged approach serves to amplify the value of organizations' data – for instance enabling users to run inference directly on their database, right next to their data, while precluding sprawling APIs, ETL approaches, training needs, and data integration processes.
- **Beyond database convergence**, Oracle takes every opportunity, today as always, to remind us that it also embraces a huge range of consumption *divergence!* On prem, in the cloud, cloud on prem, flexibly and dynamically sized components, and your pick of manual, automated, or autonomous deployments. While the range of choices can get semantically befuddling, the essence is simple: when it comes to Oracle Databases, users can have precisely what they want, where and how they choose.
- **APEX is something of a hidden gem** in Oracle's product toolbox. It was front-and-center in the announcement (21c was interestingly second) and Oracle wants to register its value *both* in historical *and* contemporary terms; historical value in terms of experience (not many vendors have been actively using ML for 15 years!) and enterprise-quality, with contemporary applicability to “citizen developers” by being inexpensive (even with a free tier) and also available separately from the database itself. Putting its clear value to one side, it is aimed squarely at the “classy-but-cool” application developers.



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The *improvements* within both announcements are clear; so, what about the *integration*? Basically, this is all about getting the most out of users' databases - and their associated data and applications of course - in as efficient and effective a way as possible. Mendelsohn and his use of the smartphone comparison made me wonder how to find a suitable added analogy to explain this; his last name made me think (albeit with the addition of an extra “s”) of Mendelssohn, the famous 19th century composer and sparked an idea: Oracle's approach is – if you will – that of a full-blown “symphonic database,” with all the instruments of the “data orchestra” (models, workloads, tenancy) working in unison. It's not about solo instrument sonatas, concertos, quartets, or whatever – it is instead creating an orchestral database environment, one where even you and I can pick up the APEX baton and create great, new, varied-but-integrated database-music in a highly productive way. Is this magnum opus finished? Of course not, but the movements and key themes are crystal clear, and will be music to the ears of many.

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