



Tom Kennedy
 Founder, Chairman,
 and Chief Technology Officer,
 BackOffice Associates, LLC

Within two minutes of meeting Tom Kennedy, you realize he has an encyclopedic knowledge of SAP data architecture. Since 1978, Kennedy has been designing and building technology, much of which uses the fourth-generation languages he developed throughout the 1980s and 1990s. As the former CEO of Kennedy & Associates, he developed complete suites of fully integrated financial and accounting applications for global corporations. Then, 14 years ago, he turned his focus to the data quality market, specifically for SAP customers, when he co-founded BackOffice Associates, LLC.

Bringing **Knowledge,** **Efficiencies,** & **Quality,** **Business-** **Ready Data**

to Your Next Implementation or Upgrade

BackOffice Associates — with an eye toward helping SAP customers improve and manage the quality of their data — has built a suite of over 75 purpose-built solutions, all directed at data quality. Kennedy pioneered the term “Boring Go Live,” and over 350 SAP customers have since experienced uneventful — and successful — data migrations.

Q Before founding BackOffice Associates, you spent most of your career architecting business applications. How did you end up in the data quality business?

About 14 years ago, a friend who was working at a telecommunications company approached me for assistance regarding an SAP project. His team had been trying numerous different approaches to get their data “business ready” for their new SAP systems.

When I arrived, the data conversion team consisted of 25 ABAP programmers working on loading data into the systems. I proposed an alternative strategy for building a nontechnical, business-focused approach to preparing and loading data. We replaced the 25 programmers with four business-savvy consultants.

That was many years ago. But what was the secret? Experience matters. To solve the data quality problem, you need business people looking at business data.

Q How do you get your clients aligned, organized, and focused on the critical data elements of an SAP project?

Companies with inadequate business processes in place generally have problems maintaining a business-ready level of data quality. Getting the business to

focus on data issues early in the SAP project life cycle is a major key to our success. If you give business people specific, actionable analyses and reports that contain obvious data inconsistencies, they will correct the issues. If you monitor their progress and provide metrics on how they're doing, they will be more apt to keep up with the necessary data cleansing.

I could give thousands of examples of actionable items we provide to our customers. A vague comment like "Go clean up your data" is not an actionable event. We get very specific right from the start of a project. For example, we provide a list of manufactured items that need a bill of materials (BOM). Without a BOM, the back-end SAP system can't appropriately cost each item, and in turn, the customer can't create an invoice for the item. We work closely with the business and the project team to ensure that all data meets the SAP system requirements well before go-live. And we pay close attention to specific data quality issues that can be tied to a business process.

Q So what does BackOffice bring to the table to help SAP customers create "business-ready" data?

We see that data migration often accounts for 20% to 40% of the cost of a new SAP implementation or upgrade on average. At BackOffice, we believe it's possible to get that percentage down to single digits, but it takes experience and purpose-built tools that accelerate the migration process and eliminate the custom work that goes along with a traditional extract, transform, and load (ETL) data migration approach.

BackOffice has now reached a milestone with over 250 data migration and data governance experts trained to use solutions purposely built and integrated for use with SAP systems. These easy-to-use solutions, which were specifically architected for data migration and data governance in global ERP environments, eliminate much of the custom work required in more traditional methods. The methodology and experience that BackOffice brings to an SAP project deliver an affordable strategy to any company considering implementing an SAP solution.

Q What does it take to deliver a "Boring Go Live" data migration?

Since joining my first SAP project, I have found that having small, focused teams with business and functional experience is imperative to accomplishing a successful data migration or data governance project. You must also have a thorough, well-designed, easy-to-follow methodology that works seamlessly with powerful yet simple tools that do not require advanced technological skills. I've spent my entire career building solutions that remove complexity and simplify the effort required to achieve results.

Technology plays a part, but the business must maintain control of and be responsible for the data. The business owns

the data, and only the business can effectively ensure the data will be ready for an SAP system.

Our strategy also provides for the constant changes that occur throughout projects. We have developed a repeatable process that allows for efficient data migration and that tests the business relevancy, accuracy, and completeness of all data before loading it into an SAP system.

Q How can BackOffice help a company quickly implement SAP solutions and immediately see returns?

BackOffice brings a tremendous amount of knowledge and efficiencies to any SAP implementation. We show clients what their data will look like and how it will behave once the data is in the system. We believe bringing that awareness to a project can accelerate an implementation. We see more and more clients asking for us to join in the "blueprinting" phase of a project to allow the data to affect the system design.

We can show customers how to eliminate unnecessary configuration from their projects. We can reduce months of mapping work to just a few spreadsheet-free weeks. We provide extensive, pre-built content that allows migration and governance projects to eliminate many arduous steps. All told, we enable powerful automation in all areas of data quality, including data migration and data governance.

Q How does BackOffice's approach differ from other data migration strategies?

Some data migration strategies focus expressly on ETL, whereas BackOffice believes ETL is only a small part — less than 10% — of the effort to successfully migrate SAP data. Successful data migrations require purpose-built tools with accelerators and sophisticated technology architected jointly with a proven methodology to deliver data that is ready for the SAP system.

Basing your data migration strategy on an ETL approach may lead to extensive project delays and possibly failure. Most of our customers have tried and failed when using an ETL strategy. Now, many of them come to BackOffice for data migration and data governance guidance because we can deliver complete solutions without custom-building all the complex elements required for a successful project.

BackOffice has created a business approach for successfully preparing and migrating your data. From the initial mappings to the final data loads, we cover every element required to eliminate the risk factors of any given implementation project. Since 1997, BackOffice has provided a complete, end-to-end solution for data migration and is fully accountable for ensuring that all data is business-ready on go-live day. ■