# Interview with Brent Ozar

Almost a month ago Brent Ozar did a blog interview with me regarding the Database Corruption Challenge so I thought I would return the gesture and do the same for him. I ended up going to the Bellingham SQL Server Users Group (PASS Chapter) to build the list of questions. The members of the group helped build the questions, and here is what we came up with, including responses from Brent.

Brent is a Microsoft MVP, Microsoft Certified Master of SQL Server, and published author. He lives in Chicago and is the founder of Brent Ozar Unlimited.

**Question: For the self-taught or accidental DBA where do you suggest they start to improve their SQL Server Skills?**

Brent: DBAs get in the most trouble when they assume the backups are working. They're probably not. Go set up a development server or VM, and restore last night's backups onto it. Figure out what it would take to go live on that newly restored server. Rehearse it a few times, get confident in it, and then build a little checklist with the length of time it will take. Show it to your manager as proof that you're working to keep the company's data safe.

After that, it's so tempting to get caught up just poking around in metrics. Go to your manager or

your top power user and ask, "What do you want to do, but the database is holding you back?" These are the people who will give you a raise, and these are the reasons they'll give it to you. Help them help you.

**What tools do you recommend beyond the typical Microsoft install for any DBA to help diagnose problems?**

Brent: I go in this order:

- sp_WhoIsActive to see if there's a big blocking chain
- sp_AskBrent to see if there's a long-running job, slow disks, memory under pressure, etc
- sp_BlitzCache to see if there's unusual queries showing up in the top 10
- sp_Blitz to see if there's a serious configuration issue I didn't know about

**Question: It appears that the university system doesn’t prepare CS and IT grads for the real world of SQL Server and database work. What could universities do to better prepare students for SQL Server?**

Brent: I think the concept of a 4-year degree is doomed, period. I don't think universities should prepare students for IT tools because the industry changes so fast. If students want to learn IT, they don't need to wait for college, and they certainly don't need to pay for it. From CodeSchool.com to KhanAcademy.org, there are amazing free resources to get you started on your journey.

The thing universities have always failed at is helping students discover what career is right for them. Follow what you love from early on, figure out how to make a career out of it. There are a bazillion free ways to learn it and perfect it.

The thing universities have always succeeded at is helping like-minded students form communities. In big cities, coworking spaces are accomplishing that same goal today. If you're a student in a small city and you want to know how to become successful, maybe the right answer isn't spending tens of thousands of dollars on university tuition - maybe you should hang out in a coworking space for 3 months and see where it takes you.

**Question: What are the top SQL Server misconceptions that you encounter when working with clients? Or another way to ask it what are the top problems you end up fixing for clients?**

Brent: Everybody comes to us with performance problems, but most of the time, we end up fixing availability problems too. People were so focused on making the server faster that they forgot to make it reliable. Sometimes, just explaining how much horsepower SQL Server needs for backups

and DBCCs makes them understand that the hardware was woefully underpowered, and fixing the reliability thing makes performance better.

**Question: Where do you see NoSQL going? Do you think that SQL Server DBA's and programmers should dump SQL Server for the variety of No SQL solutions?**

Brent: I love seeing new database solutions because there's a lot of stuff that never really belonged in relational databases anyway. We just threw the data in there by default because SQL Server (and its cousins) were fast enough and reliable enough and easy enough.

Today, if you want to store session state or unstructured text data, the LAST place you should be putting it is Microsoft SQL Server. I looooove SQL Server, but don't try to cram your square peg into its round hole.

If you're a data professional, don't be afraid of alternatives. Today's business is still pouring more and more new data into relational databases. The insights that come out of unstructured data end up being inserted into relational databases where it's still necessary for your e-commerce systems.

**Question: What are your favorite time saving tips for SQL Server Management Studio?**

Brent: Get the free version of SQL Sentry Plan Explorer. It's not the only way I look at execution plans - heck, it's not even the FIRST way I look - but I like having different ways to visualize plans. It's helped me countless times.

**Question: How did you become a Microsoft MVP? How does someone throw their hat in the ring to become a MVP?**

Brent: The MVP process starts with a nomination - you can nominate yourself or someone else here: http://mvp.microsoft.com/en-us/nominate-an-mvp.aspx. After that, it's kinda hazy. Microsoft keeps it that way on purpose to stop people from gaming the system.

Microsoft lets you know that you've been nominated, and asks you to fill out some forms to quantify your community work. You can see the basics of how that works by looking at MVP profiles at http://mvp.microsoft.com, where MVPs list the number of speaking engagements they do, how they volunteer, where they've blogged, etc.

If you want to become MVP, the best advice I can give you is to go into the speaker room at local and regional events. No, not to rub elbows and tell people to nominate you - that's not the point. The point is to go hang out with MVPs. Frankly, that's the biggest benefit of the MVP program - the ability to build relationships with other smart, passionate people - and you don't have to wait to become an MVP to get that. Just start doing it. After all, the MVPs aren't MVPs because they're quiet, private people.

**Question: How as you are involvement as a member of PASS help you grow your business?**

Brent: Time for me to put on my flameproof underwear.

It doesn't.

The vast, vast majority of us clients are having a performance emergency, and they just start Googling for help. After our name comes up in enough searches for problems, they say, "You know what - why don't we just call these guys and see what happens?"

Believe it or not, most members of PASS don't regularly hire consultants. PASS members are proactively growing their knowledge, staying on top of their servers, using our free tools to find the right root cause and the easiest solution.

I give back to the community (PASS, SQLBits, SQL Saturdays, SQL Intersections, Microsoft Ignite, etc) because it's a genuinely fun thing to do. It's amazing to be standing up on a stage, explaining a concept, and see the lights go on in attendee eyes. That's just priceless. Anytime I can see that light go on, it's worth it.

## Related Links

- Brent Ozar
- sp_WhoIsActive
- sp_AskBrent
- sp_BlitzCache
- sp_Blitz
- Microsoft MVP Program