



Databorough

IBM i: Extinction?

Another raging debate on LinkedIn!

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Few things in IT have lasted longer than the debate about the future of the AS/400-IBM i.

Over the last few weeks another round of the debate took place, unplanned, on LinkedIn. (I've posted the discussion group name at the end of this article.)

Here you had normally well-behaved, middle-aged, professional people resorting to name calling, anger, and yes, even Jesus.

What was the outcome of this free for all?

As I try to do in my better moments, I made a few comments looking for common ground where everyone could agree. I was pretty much completely ignored. Hysteria is much more interesting. But is it justified?

The Cheerleaders, the Naysayers and the Majority in the Middle

The IBM i cheerleaders believe the platform has a long future ahead of it, while others believe it's a sinking ship and you better get off yesterday.

A little reflection on the longevity of this debate should tell you that nothing about this question is urgent.

The Saving Grace of Practicality

I believe I can spell out the most practical strategy in just a few bullets:

- Focus on improving maintainability and therefore, business responsiveness
 - Improve maintainability and responsiveness by leveraging tools
 - Improve maintainability and responsiveness by restructuring your most volatile, complex code

It is a well known fact that software becomes more and more complex over time unless steps are taken to remediate it – so do so!

(As a side note, this increasing complexity was articulated as the second law of software evolution which you can read about here: [Laws of Software Evolution](#))

- Position yourself for a smart and smooth, eventual application transition
 - Transition to a rewritten application, IBM i or not,
 - Or transition to a purchased package.
 - Get positioned by focusing your IT processes on the elements from your application that will survive the transition: your business rules and data model

Download the
[IBM Redbook on Improving Maintenance and Modernization](#)

Here is a [Guide To Business Rules Recovery](#) that provides more information.

The Practicality of Tools

In his book examining 12,000 software projects and their critical success or failure factors, *Applied Software Measurement: Global Analysis of Productivity and Quality*, long-time software metrics guru Capers Jones makes a strong case for the cost effectiveness of software tools.

In measuring what most impacts maintenance productivity, the analysis showed that three of the top six most beneficial factors were maintenance tools:

Factors	Gain in Productivity	Tools
Uses static analysis tools	+30%	X-Analysis
Uses code refactoring tools	+29%	X-Modernize
Uses complexity analysis tools	+20%	X-Audit

(You can see the full list here: [Software Maintenance Productivity Factors](#))

Indeed, maintenance of ever more complex legacy software applications can be extended for many years through the smart use of good tools.

Prolonging the productive life of applications can defer multi-million dollar expenditures years into the future.

At the same time

Using tools to recover business rules and data models, or to restructure RPG code prior to conversion, can save hundreds of thousands of dollars in the analysis and coding of new applications.

Back To the Debate

I've used this article as my chance to articulate the common, practical, middle ground on the question of IBM i longevity. I don't think there is anything urgent that IBM i shops must do, but I do think there are things that are *important* that IBM i shops should do, as soon as practical:

- Make their applications more maintainable and responsive to business needs
- Position for an eventual transition, in whatever direction makes the most sense

If you are a member of LinkedIn, this most recent discussion took place in the AS/400 Professionals group. The discussion was named "How true is true that the younger generation engineers are NO longer keen to work on IBM AS400" (with all the typos.)

I also invite anyone interested in connecting with me on LinkedIn to do so!