

AS/400 LUG Shares Chief i Architect's "Why i?" Arguments
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by Timothy Prickett Morgan

Back when I started in this AS/400 racket as a newbie reporter who would never dream of asking a mean question of anyone and did not have much of a sense of the business world or how it truly used computers to get work done, I heard something that seemed like a timeless truth even in the late 1980s: No one ever got fired for buying IBM. And no one back then had to justify buying an AS/400. The back-end apps you wanted ran on it, it had an IBM label and a sophisticated, easy to use database and programming language, and hundreds of thousands of companies owned them.

Here we are more than two decades later, no job or platform choice seems to be safe, but it looks like the safest bet, based on revenue streams and the vast installed base of maybe 20 million servers and maybe 80,000 ISVs, has changed to no one ever got fired for buying [Microsoft](#) Windows. And the AS/400--by which I mean the Power Systems platform running the i For Business operating system here in 2010--needs to justify continued investment at most shops despite its long history of serving the companies that have deployed it. The AS/400 defined the mainstream in the late 1980s for midrange computing, despite being something of a technological freak, and is pretty much the only surviving platform from the heady days of the 1980s and 1990s of midrange platforms from Digital Equipment, [Hewlett-Packard](#), [NEC](#), and a slew of others that have gone the way of all flesh. And like the three remaining Unix platforms--AIX, HP-UX, and Solaris--OS/400, as embodied currently in i 7.1, is still hanging in there. I would say, and IBM would never admit, that all the best aspects of OS/400 have been used to make AIX good enough to beat HP-UX and Solaris, and both OS/400 and AIX were priced at a premium to generate IBM lots of profits instead of competing against Windows. IBM makes more money doing it this way, and that matters more to Big Blue than anything else.

I personally hate this strategy, since I wanted IBM to make the AS/400 compete with and beat Unix and then Windows, but you'll notice I am not the president, chief executive officer, or chairman of International Business Machines. I am not even the guy handing out towels in the executive washroom in Armonk.

With a new wave of Power7 systems and i 7.1 software coming out, and the temptation increasing to spend money on the i box in your shop as the economy is on the mend, whether you like it or not, your shop is going to have to justify the existence of your i platform. And the AS/400 Large User Group, that exclusive club and private corporation whose membership includes the 110 largest i shops in the world, feels your pain. And the AS/400 LUG has reached out to *The Four Hundred* to help you make your case.

I got the following message from Lynne Benedict, the business analyst who manages the AS/400 LUG:

We spoke about 18 months ago for an article you published about the LUG. A few months ago we captured for public consumption a "Why i?" presentation by IBM i chief architect, Steve Will. It has since been published to YouTube and I wanted to pass the link to you to do with what you will.

Thank you for your time,

--Lynne

Well, what else would I do but tell all of you about it? The link to the "Why i?" presentation on YouTube by Will [is here](#), and if you have YouTube blocked on your firewall at work, [try this alternate streaming service](#). In case you don't know, Will has replaced Frank Soltis, the creator of the System/38 and AS/400 architectures, as the chief architect for the i platform. Tough shoes to fill, of course, but someone has to do the walking. And as you will see in his presentation, Will knows his stuff. And, as you will see from this six-part, approximately one-hour production on YouTube, the case can be made for Power Systems i.

The presentation was put together last winter, ahead of the Power7 server and i 7.1 announcements and it is less vague than a lot of the stuff we see coming out of IBM concerning the i platform. I have criticisms of some of the claims that Will makes about total cost of ownership comparisons--as you might imagine--and as I have said many times, I want harder figures than the ITG studies that IBM commissions from time to time.

I understand that the integrated DB2 database has some self-management features that Microsoft's SQL Server doesn't and that means you don't need a database administrator, and I also understand that the integrated storage management that comes through single-level storage means you don't need a storage admin, either. But I also know that just like a lot of AS/400 shops have always had one programmer who is also the system admin, there are zillions (okay, millions) of Windows shops running sophisticated database-driven, Webby applications where the only person managing the entire collection of X64 systems is an MSCE.

Will started out the "Why i?" presentation by explaining something I have been saying for years, but you'll never get Sam Palmisano to say: "It is important to note that IBM i has more customers than any other IBM systems platform." Will went on to explain to the AS/400 LUG audience, "We sell to tens of thousands of customers and we have hundreds of thousands of customers active on this platform. They happen to be small and medium businesses in addition to large customers." SMBs, by the way, that may not know or simply care about the platform they are using because it becomes transparent due to its reliability and stability. Like a good husband or wife, I would say.

IBM Power Systems IBM

The IBM i Business

IBM i has more customers than any other IBM system platform

<p>115+ Countries</p> <p>Top Countries</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. United States2. Italy3. Japan4. Germany5. Spain6. France7. UK8. Canada9. ...	<p>100,000's Customers 100,000's Systems</p> 	<p>20+ Industries</p> <p>Top Industries</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Wholesale Dist.2. Retail3. Computer Services4. Insurance5. Retail Banking6. Consumer Package7. Travel & Transportation8. Automotive9. ...
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7. *The New Power Equation* ©2009 IBM Corporation

Will knew he was preaching to the choir--and to the front row of the choir, too, with the AS/400 LUG being his original audience--but he said he hoped the presentation had some interesting bits of information that could be used to make the case for the i platform. Things that people may not have known to help them build their case. I found this DB2 page interesting:

IBM Power Systems IBM

DB2 for i

- **Supports new and existing apps**
 - DB2 for i is a fully compliant SQL database that also provides the unique ability to support RPG applications
 - DB2 for i was the first database to meet 100% of the core SQL 2008 ANSI standard
- **Integral to IBM i**
 - Built into and provided with IBM i
 - Integrated system and storage management and security results in easier administration
 - Majority of IBM i clients do not have a Database Administrator
- **Ready for Business Intelligence**
 - With DB2 WebQuery, IBM i supports Business Intelligence solutions without replicating data to x86 systems with SQL Server and Oracle

Self Managing Features


Feature	SQL Server	DB2 for i
Self Adjusting Query Optimizer for improved performance	No	Yes
Automatic creation of indexes	No	Yes
Automatic placement of data and indexes on disk	No	Yes
Automated Index Maintenance	No	Yes

South Carolina Student Loan

Power520 with IBM i running DB2 Web Query
Stopped extracting data to Microsoft tools

"Before the introduction of IBM DB2 Web Query, I would typically have to wait until the end of the month in order to discover if my key metrics were being met. Now with DB2 Web Query, my metrics are on-demand, interactive. I not only see my metrics daily through pie charts and graphs, but I also have both my dollars and counts tabled before me on one page! To update, I simply refresh my screen. This tool has reduced a laborious monthly task to daily usable data all with a simple key stroke! How great is that!"

David C. Rouse
Vice President of Guaranty Services



15 *THE NEW POWER EQUATION* © 2009 IBM Corporation

I knew that DB2 was fully compliant with SQL standards, but I had not realized it was the first database to meet all of the core SQL 2008 ANSI standard requirements. I have also not seen the self-managing features of the DB2 for i database explicitly laid out in contrast to those features lacking in Microsoft's SQL Server--the self-adjusting query optimizer, automatic database index creation and maintenance, and automatic placement of data on disks (and now flash). This kind of hard evidence is what is always missing from the case that is made for the i platform. We need to see more of this, and precise--not vague--economic benefits tied to it. The database is key to the AS/400 and successor platforms, and it needs to be highlighted. "We're keeping it up to date," Will said, referring to DB2 for i. "It is not just an old database that we are continuing to run."

And yes, I got a smile when the IT Jungle logo made it to the end of the presentation, where Will was talking about the "active and passionate community." You bet my kids' college tuition that I am active and passionate.