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# CONNECT™

The official Journal of COMMON A Users Group

COMMON



**COMMON Expands Educational Opportunities**

**Ross A. Mauri, General Manager, IBM Power Systems, speaks to COMMON**

**An Introduction to .NET Technology**

**COMMON Education Foundation Impacts Future Professionals**

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# 2008

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- *Seven Strategies for Success by Bob Tipton*
- *Domino Strategy and Directions*



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## Dear COMMON Colleague,

**Y**ou may very well be reading this at COMMON's 2008 Annual Meeting and Expo in Nashville, Tennessee. If you are, thank you for coming! You are participating in the largest event of its kind anywhere in the world, and because of that you have a unique opportunity for an experience you just can not get any other way.



Randy Dufault

If you are the one in charge of the budget for conference attendance and you are either at the Annual Meeting or you sent some of your staff in your place, thank you too. And, assuming you are not here already, maybe you can consider attending our annual IT Executive Conference, held each year in conjunction with the Annual Meeting.

In my experience, the wealth of things that everyone brings back from a conference event is almost immeasurable. Sure, there is new knowledge: knowledge about i5/OS, knowledge about new things from IBM, and knowledge about vendor products. Sure, there is collateral material from both IBM and the vendors. But there is always something more, something that is understandably difficult to identify and understandably even more difficult to quantify.

Sure, you can learn a lot just browsing the Internet. In fact, I credit my start in technology to a browsing sort of experience. A small company I worked for had a falling out with their programming consultant—the guy just sort of disappeared—yet they needed to get some unfinished development projects done. I had taken a programming class in High School so I at least had a vague idea of what was involved. Since the Internet was only a figment of someone's imagination at that time, I bought a couple of hobbyist magazines, poked around a bit, and got some problems solved. It seemed like a lot of fun, so I went back to school and changed careers.

That initial learning effort took a long time, and I am sure I developed some pretty bad habits and lots of pretty awful code.

My learning experience with what we now call i5/OS was completely different. Our company, a System/36 shop that had never seen a System/38, received an early ship AS/400 to use in a customer project. It was supposed to run just like a System/36 right? Yeah right! Needless to say neither I nor any of my coworkers

had a clue what was going on inside that beige rack. We needed to learn and time was of the essence.

An IBMer suggested the upcoming COMMON conference might be a good learning option. So I was off to Toronto where I attended what was the first of what is now 20 years of COMMON meetings. I have to say that for me, it was far and away the best way to hit the ground running with that awesome new machine.

Sure, I learned stuff in the sessions. Sure, I poked around the IBM technology area. But more than that, I met some of the folks that built the system and I met some folks who knew and understood the System/38. Interacting with those folks helped me put a context around all the books and lectures. That context allowed me to go back to my beige rack and quickly make it do what needed to be done.

In 1983 **Howard Gardner**, a professor of education at Harvard University, published his theory of multiple intelligences. I will let you go look up the details, but the essence of the theory is that any individual's learning happens eight different ways. Reading the printed page or printed screen falls into

only one of those eight. While a COMMON Annual Meeting experience might not hit all eight, from what I can tell, it gets pretty darn close.

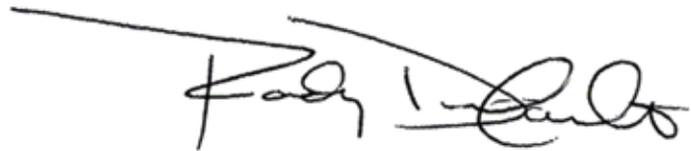
So what you bring back from a COMMON Annual Meeting is much more than a pile of handouts and Expo goodies. There are new connections, refreshed past connections and lots of knowledge—not just learning, knowledge. That includes new knowledge about the system, knowledge about the future, and knowledge that will help both you and your company do everything just a bit better.

And if attending the COMMON Annual Meeting every year doesn't work out for you, don't forget about the other exciting COMMON conference events, COMMON Focus and, new for 2008, COMMON Directions.

While I know that I can usually figure something out from just reading a book or browsing the Internet, I also know that is not necessarily the best way and certainly is not the most efficient way. For me, and I am sure for almost everyone, the conference experience, including COMMON's Annual Meeting and Expo, is a much better way to grow in my profession and grow as an individual.

Sincerely,

Randy Dufault  
COMMON President  
randy\_dufault@common.org



## Submitting Requirements to IBM

By Ron Newman

In an effort to allow our COMMON members' voices to be heard at IBM, we need to focus on getting requirements from our members. The COMMON Americas Advisory Council (CAAC) has done a great job of giving IBM their requirements, and now we would like to expand that to all COMMON and iSociety members.

You've all heard the famous song, "Follow the Yellow Brick Road." Well, if you have tried to enter a requirement from the COMMON website or the iSociety website, you may have felt like Dorothy searching for OZ, with the path to requirements filled with dead ends, traps, and frustration.

The good news is that the requirements team from the Advocacy pillar of COMMON has changed all that. They have designed new paths that make it easier to review requirements and to enter requirements. From the COMMON website's "Members Only" tab, when you click on the "Requirements" link, you will go directly to the iSociety discussion page where you will find two new icons:

one to review requirements, and the other to enter a requirement. You will need your COMMON or iSociety user id and password to access this page. From the iSociety page, there is also now a link named "Requirements" which takes you to the discussion page that has the two new icons on it.

On the page where you enter a requirement, there are some mandatory fields. These are meant to help the team communicate with you for further definition of the requirement, and to keep you informed on the progress of your requirement throughout the process. The mandatory fields are Name, Phone, E-mail Address, Title, Problem Description, and Business Impact. You can also review all of the requirements, as well as make comments, rate it, and add helpful information.

**The Process:** Right now we are in Phase One of making requirements easier to input, review, and process to IBM. The process today is that when you enter a requirement, a member of the requirements team reviews the requirement (making sure it is clear and

well thought out) and gathers additional information if necessary. The team also reviews all requirements to see if the requirement you entered has already been posted by someone else. Then the group member manually fills out a CAAC requirement form. The reason for this is so IBM has one point of contact when replying to requirements. When IBM replies to the requirement you entered, that same requirement group member will post a notice in your requirement on iSociety.

As you can see, this is a manual process. In the future (Phase Two) we hope to streamline the process, as well as reinstate the voting process for requirements which was, at one time, an extremely popular benefit for COMMON members.

So, follow the fast path to Requirements and let IBM know what your needs are for the System! 

### About the Author

**Ron Newman** is the Advocacy Committee Chairperson and also serves on the CAAC. He can be reached at ron\_newman@common.org.



# Affiliated Local User Group Conferences and Special Events

## Wisconsin Midrange Computer Professional Association (WMCIPA)



### 23 Annual Spring Technical Conference

April 9-10, 2008  
Geneva Resort, Lake Geneva, WI

## Northeast User Groups Conference



[www.neugc.org](http://www.neugc.org)

April 14-16, 2008  
Sheraton Framingham Hotel,  
1657 Worcester Road  
Framingham, MA

## Toronto Users Group for System i TEC 2008



[www.tug.ca/tec](http://www.tug.ca/tec)

April 22-24, 2008  
Sheraton Parkway Toronto North  
Richmond Hill, ON, Canada

## Southeast Michigan iSeries Users Group MITEC - Michigan iSeries Technical Education Conference



[www.semiug.org](http://www.semiug.org)  
June, 2008

Southeast Michigan

## OCEAN User Group OCEAN - 15th annual "Catch the Wave" Technical Conference & Vendor Solution Expo



[www.ocean400.org](http://www.ocean400.org)

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## About COMMON

COMMON is an international professional association, serving the Global Community of organizations and individuals who have an interest in IBM-related technology. COMMON provides a member forum for proactively developing solutions to challenges presented by technology evolution and business requirements. COMMON provides pre-eminent leadership in education. Members receive unparalleled educational benefits that facilitate the effective use of information systems and enhance professional growth. COMMON promotes multiple vehicles for communication, an environment that encourages information exchange through interpersonal knowledge sharing, and a level of support unavailable elsewhere in the information technology industry. COMMON is independent of IBM.

\* See page 10 for the calendar of upcoming COMMON events.

# Microsoft and IBM Play Nice

An introduction to .NET technology for the System i developer

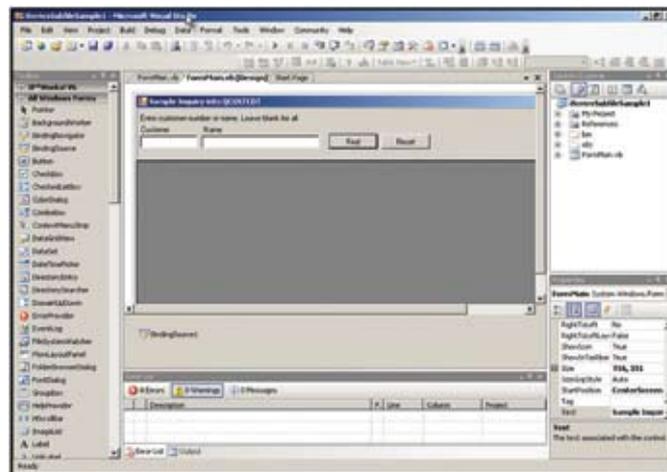
By Richard J. Schoen

Welcome to the world of Microsoft® .NET technology. You're probably not used to seeing the word Microsoft in an IBM related publication. However, as you continue reading, I think you'll find that Microsoft and IBM can play well together in the IBM® System i™ environment. This article introduces .NET technology and provides an overview of how you can utilize it in your current and future System i application development. After reading this, you may find yourself compelled to learn more about the .NET application development environment and how you can use the Microsoft toolset to quickly develop high-impact desktop and Web-based applications for the System i platform.

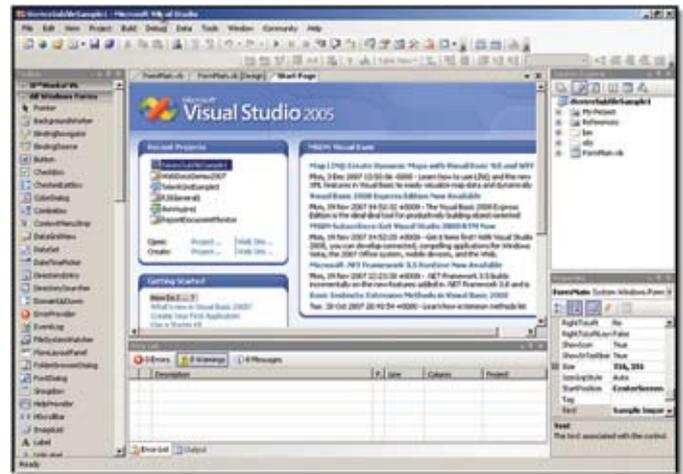
## Setting the Stage

As I've attended various System i events over the last few years, I've noticed a disturbing trend. It seemed that .NET technology had been ignored or poorly covered at most of the seminars and educational sessions. RPG, Java™, and PHP languages are great development tools, but if you don't see the entire picture of what's available for System i development environments, you can't make an informed decision about the best development methodology to use for developing new System i applications for the desktop or Web. Because of the lack of .NET education tracks at COMMON, I asked the user group to add a series of introductory sessions and a one-day seminar to give System i developers

an introduction to .NET. They obliged me and we did the first set of sessions at the Spring COMMON 2007 Conference in Anaheim. We also did a one-day lab class at the October 2007 COMMON Focus event in Columbus, and we are likely to repeat the sessions this month in Nashville.



Subfile Sample in Design Mode



Visual Studio Development Environment

based ERP and other applications. I've also personally seen companies struggle with the decision to continue using their System i platform or completely migrate to a new one. We in the System i world need to provide these companies with reasons to keep their legacy systems and the tools to modernize them for future needs.

With a little education on how to use a technology like .NET to develop applications, a System i programmer can quickly write a graphical application on top of an existing System i solution, thus adding a new user interface to important parts of an existing system or simply adding

## The Catalyst for Change

I want to provide a little background that should illustrate why System i developers might want to consider updating their skill sets and learn a new technology such as .NET. Over the last 15 years, we've seen the Internet revolution come to pass. We've seen personal computers go from being almost non-existent to a daily staple. The newer generation of young CFOs and CIOs are more computer literate and expect a GUI to front-end every application they use. Because of this change, many companies have begun to replace the System i applications that have run their businesses successfully for years with Windows™ technology-

ease of access to existing ERP data from a Windows or Web-based inquiry. My experience with this dates back to the early 1990s when I was working as a developer for a company whose executive team demanded a daily report that could be quickly accessed from a desktop icon. They wanted to see a chart showing how things were going, not a greenbar report. We used a query tool to build the data into a pie chart and showed how System i information could be quickly published in a graphical format. This is how I formed the phrase: "A little GUI can go a long way" when trying to build PR value for the System i platform. ▶

## Why .NET?

With the variety of development methodologies available today, such as Java, PHP, RPG CGI, and .NET, why would anyone choose the .NET development route for developing new System i applications? As a long-time System i developer, I've had the opportunity to work with every one of these development environments and more. After recently going through a two-year learning curve to become proficient in Java, I concluded that the average System i developer might not have the time to effectively learn and implement this new development technology, especially if they wanted to quickly build Windows and Web applications to enhance the value of their System i architecture.

At the same time I was learning Java, I was evaluating .NET technology as a next-step migration path for several of our existing Windows-based products. What I learned after working with the .NET technology is that I could quickly write a subfile-like Windows inquiry application in fewer than 100 lines of actual code. I also learned that I could access my existing RPG programs on the System i platform, take advantage of the database and achieve sub-second response time from my Windows and Web applications—just like I was get-

RPG. A lot of the concepts such as sub-procedures and D-specs have direct correlations between RPG and the VB.NET language.

## What Is .NET?

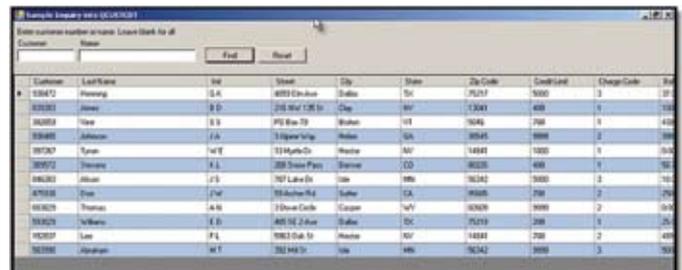
As the year 2000 approached, we developers spent a lot of time worrying about whether our applications would work after the clock struck midnight. The moment passed and I remember thinking,

“OK, now that the new millennium has proven that there really wasn't much to worry about, it's time to start thinking about what exciting things will happen during the 21st century.” The year 2000 was also the year that Java really hit the scene and was promoted by IBM. Meanwhile, the Microsoft development team was working on a new technology that would soon become known as the .NET framework.

The way I like to explain it is that Microsoft sat back and observed what Sun was doing with the Java language and environment. Then they chose the best pieces of the Java environment and improved on those to bring us the .NET framework. At the same time, they wanted to appease the Visual Basic and C/C++ developers on the PC side of the fence with a single, unified programming environment that supported both language sets. The Internet also needed to be an integral part of this new development environment because of its growing importance.

The .NET programming environment was released in 2002 and received with great fanfare and fear from the PC programming world. VB6 had become entrenched as the PC programming language of choice and

VB.Net had some changes to the language that made VB programmers a little intimidated, much like the initial fear a System i developer can feel when choosing to learn a new language. Recent improvements to the VB.Net language,



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100517	Green	1.H	11111 Main	Heath	MA	11881	1000	1	10
100512	Thomas	1.I	200 Green Park	Stamford	CT	06320	400	1	10
100515	Allen	1.J	107 Lakeside	San Jose	CA	95128	3000	2	10
100518	Price	1.K	55 Adams Rd	Stamford	CT	06908	200	2	10
100525	Thomas	1.N	12345 Maple	Casper	WY	10000	3000	2	10
100528	Williams	1.O	400 5th Ave	Stamford	CT	15119	200	1	10
100517	Lee	1.L	10000 Main	Heath	MA	14881	200	2	10
100516	Harman	1.F	302 Main St	San Jose	CA	16342	3000	3	10

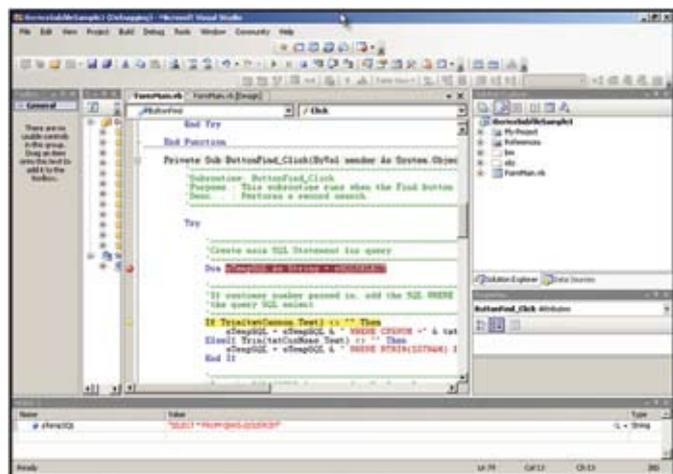
Running Subfile Sample

PC-to-System i connectivity speeds and System i database drivers as well as .NET 2.0 and the Visual Studio 2005 programming toolsets have made writing desktop applications, Web applications and Web services with .NET a lot easier. Now, a FREE version of the Visual Studio 2005 and the recently released Visual Studio 2008 programming environment is available to programmers who want to try their hand at developing desktop and Web applications (<http://msdn.microsoft.com/vstudio/express>). With all the recent improvements and FREE tools available, there is virtually no barrier in place, other than a slow Internet connection, that would prevent developers from using .NET technology to start developing applications for the System i platform.

## System i Connectivity with .NET

One of the things I like best about programming applications in the .NET environment is the ability to write an interactive subfile-style of inquiry with little programming. Direct SQL calls to the database let me easily filter records and display them in a data grid that is essentially the equivalent of a subfile. This type of program can be easily expanded to create table maintenance, order entry and other programs.

Remote-command calls provide a basic functionality that allows .Net programmers the capability to run any CL command or program that doesn't require the user to receive any parameter feedback. A remote command call is pretty much limited to a success or failure notification



Interactive Debugging

ting from my System i applications. Really, the choice for me boiled down to the fact that I found the .NET environment and, in particular, the VB.NET language was natural and easy to learn, just like

that the job was run. A CPF message (System i error message) can be returned to the user application upon program completion or error allowing for simple error notification. Although limited in functionality, remote-command calls can be a great way to build a graphical front end to a report call that you then want to submit as a batch job with the submit job (SBMJOB) command. You may also have a CL command that sends back a simple message to provide user feedback or you may simply want to trigger a System i process from your desktop or web application.

Remote-program calls are even more powerful. A remote-program call is an important extension to the remote-command call that lets you call any existing System i RPG, COBOL, or CL program, pass parameters to the program and receive back the parameter results after the call. On the System i platform, we've always used the term "call/parm" to describe this functionality; however, the same functionality can be used from within

a .NET application to call a System i program and pass parms. This lets developers reuse existing System i program logic in a Windows or Web application without rewriting existing System i RPG or COBOL code. An example of this in the real world might be passing parameters from a Web page for a customer who wants to purchase an item. A call to an RPG pricing program could be made to return custom pricing based on an existing pricing routine instead of rewriting the code in VB.NET.

Stored procedures are another topic that could warrant several articles. Think of a stored procedure as a nice way to package up an SQL query or an RPG program call so that parameters or arrays of record data can be easily passed to the program and returned to a Windows or Web application. Stored procedures are a useful way to write a chunk of logic on the System i platform and use it from within RPG and COBOL programs or a .NET windows or Web application.

### What's Next?

Hopefully with this article I've stimulated your curiosity enough to want to try the .NET toolsets and that you'll start thinking of ways you can add value to your System i platform by building Windows and Web applications that take advantage of its best features. Also please attend the .Net sessions at COMMON events and provide feedback to the COMMON board if you would like to see more .Net for System i classes. 



Richard Schoen

### About the Author

**Richard Schoen** is the president and chief technology officer of RJS Software Systems, an information-management and data-integration solutions developer for the System i platform. Richard founded RJS in 1990 and today guides the direction and development of all of the company's core products. Richard can be reached at: [richard@rjssoftware.com](mailto:richard@rjssoftware.com)

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# adidas—a name synonymous with style and agility—applies the same principles to its 5250 System i legacy applications

By Marcus Dee



## Background

The adidas Group was started in 1920 by Adi Dassler, a German entrepreneur. Adi was a real visionary and wanted to make the best sports shoes money could buy. Having set up his small business and naming it “adidas,” no guessing where the name came from—he set about the manufacture of his perfect sports footwear. By 1928, sports people were wearing his shoes at the Olympic Games of that year, held in Amsterdam.

The rest, as they say, is history. Today, with World Headquarters in Herzogenaurach, Germany (known to insiders as Herzo-base), adidas has become a name that is synonymous with quality, style, and agility, associated with every conceivable sport and leisure activity, and involved in one way or another with every major sporting event in the global calendar today.

From those humble origins in 1920, it is now a corporation with revenues around €10 billion and representation in every major market in the world.

Today, the company is the world’s largest manufacturer of sports footwear, clothing and accessories and in 2006 acquired one of its major competitors, Reebok.

adidas Korea is just one of the many successful national subsidiaries of the group, now with 500 stores around the country. Being a long-established user of IBM® System i™ hardware, it had developed its own legacy ERP application which has successfully coped with the company’s requirements for some years.

Many organizations that have large investments on the **System i** platform

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## Challenge

The problem was—and it's a problem shared by many 5250 based applications around the world—that the system was hampered by its green-screen design and text interface. There was also no chance of successfully and easily achieving the integration requirements being consistently identified by users for the desktop functions of Microsoft® Office™ etc.

“Our system needed agile responses and data integrity throughout all the processes relating to new product announcements, promotions and the processing of orders and sales. To achieve these requirements, we investigated a number of different options, and decided to work with a third party vendor who could help us develop a new graphical, web-enabled user interface on the System i, based on our text-based legacy system,” said **B.H. Lee**, Team Leader of adidas Korea's IT team.

## Solution

“Our end users are very happy with the convenience and added functions that we have provided them with. They love the seamless integration with Microsoft Office and now think the System i is wonderful!” said Mr. Lee.

They now have an integrated, Web-enabled system capable of graphical information and easy, rapid integration with other applications—and with no changes required to the legacy system! Their new user interface integrates seamlessly with



Excel™, Word™ and other desktop applications. The old sayings, “Seeing is believing” and “A picture speaks a thousand words” are what come to mind when Mr. Lee considers the outcomes of his recent modernization project. Indeed, he reckons that the real worth of a good application is when it outperforms user expectations, and that is what he and his team have achieved for adidas Korea's users—not at all dissimilar to the aspirations of his founder, Adi Dassler, all those years ago.

“The more we enhance, modernize, and integrate our applications, the more we appreciate the power of our System i,” said Mr. Lee. “Our users are now actively suggesting other ways in which the applications can benefit from our new capabilities—it seems to them that there is very little you can't do with it!”

As the corporate slogan says, “Impossible is Nothing!” 

## About the Author

**Marcus Dee** is Managing Director, **looksoftware**. Marcus has a degree in Computer Science and over 25 years experience in the IBM midrange. Application development tools and methods were the early focus; for the past 13 years Marcus has worked with **looksoftware**, the Australian based developer of **newlook** and **soarchitect**. Today the focus is helping customers reuse, integrate and extend their existing back-end System i applications with leading front-end technologies and platforms including Web services and SOA, Outlook, Notes, Google and rich, thin and mobile clients.



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# COMMON Expands Educational Opportunities

By Manzoor Siddiqui

## COMMON Directions

**C**OMMON Directions 2008 is our newest educational conference offering, with two days of wide-ranging, i5/OS educational sessions. The two days will be jam-packed with 50 – 60 educational sessions on a variety of leading-edge topics, presented by the most respected speakers in the industry. The inaugural COMMON Directions conference will take place in Dallas, Texas at the Radisson Hotel Central Dallas on Thursday, September 25 and Friday, September 26, 2008.



Attendees of COMMON Directions will also benefit from having access to a smaller, tabletop-style Expo. They will be able to view and get hands-on demonstrations of the latest solutions available to them from a limited number of exhibitors. This new educational conference promises to be a two-day version of all that you have come to expect from

a traditional COMMON conference. COMMON Directions expands upon our “COMMON... Customized” education model, providing the COMMON membership and the i5/OS

community yet another option to maximize their i5/OS education, while minimizing time away from the office. Learn more about COMMON Directions at [www.common.org/directions](http://www.common.org/directions).

## COMMON Focus

COMMON Focus 2008 is our annual workshop conference event, featuring three days of intense, focused education through all-day workshops. This year the workshop conference will take place in the San Francisco area at the San Francisco Airport Crowne Plaza in Burlingame, California from Sunday, October 5 through Wednesday, October 8, 2008.

COMMON Focus 2008 will offer at least 15 all-day educational workshops, both in lab and lecture-style formats, providing in-depth i5/OS education across a wide range of topic areas. Attendees can attend only one workshop per day, which gives them the opportunity to focus their educational needs on a specific topic each day. This smaller, more intimate event, with a limited number of attendees, allows for more one-on-one interaction with the speakers and one another.



It will kick off on the evening of Sunday, October 5th with a Welcome Reception, where attendees and workshop instructors can meet and network. A continental breakfast and lunch will be provided each day, along with several breaks, giving attendees time to interact with each other.



COMMON Focus 2008 will also feature a tabletop-style exhibition, with a limited number of exhibitors. Attendees will be able to get hands-on demonstrations of the latest i5/OS-related solutions. This innovative educational conference will be three days of intense learning. It is an educational opportunity that you don't want to miss. Learn more at [www.common.org/focus](http://www.common.org/focus). **CC**



**Manzoor Siddiqui** is COMMON's Marketing Manager. He can be reached at [manzoor\\_siddiqui@common.org](mailto:manzoor_siddiqui@common.org)

## COMMON Calendar of Upcoming Events in 2008

March 30 – April 1, 2008	2008 COMMON IT Executive Conference – Nashville, TN	
March 30 – April 3, 2008	2008 COMMON Annual Meeting and Exposition – Nashville, TN	
April 17, 2008	Webcast: DB2 for i5/OS – Tuning for Performance	
April 28 – May 19, 2008	Webinar: ILE Essentials for RPG Programmers by Susan Gantner	
May 15, 2008	Webcast: What's New in Lotus Domino 8 Server	
July 17, 2008	Webcast: Implement a WMS with Success	
September 25 – 26, 2008	2008 COMMON Directions Conference – Dallas, Texas	
October 5 – 8, 2008	COMMON Focus 2008 Workshop – San Francisco, CA	
April 26 – 28, 2009	2009 COMMON IT Executive Conference – Reno, NV	
April 26 – 30, 2009	2009 COMMON Annual Meeting and Exposition – Reno, NV	

# Vision Solutions Brings the Best Technology Available to COMMON

Notes from an interview with Alan Arnold

**C**hange is not something of which Alan Arnold is afraid. As current CTO of Vision Solutions and a longtime COMMON member, Alan actually welcomes change and understands how important it can be. Recently, he sat down with COMMON.CONNECT to highlight opportunities within today's high availability (HA) and disaster recovery (DR) marketplace.

As part of the HA marketplace for the past eight years with Vision Solutions, Alan is able to deliver big news to COMMON members. His message is simple: High Availability and Disaster Recovery solutions are affordable and easy-to-use. The time has come to upgrade antiquated systems to a more streamlined and economical solution that controls downtime and protects your system. Indeed, anyone in the IBM® System i™ community can now access the strength and stability of High Availability that in the past has only been accessible to large corporations.

Vision Solutions is making every effort to bring their reliability to the System i community, and the company is excited to spread the word about High Availability being both economical and easy-to-use.

"There is still a large potential for growth as many System i users do not have HA yet," says Vision's CTO Alan Arnold. "Now that the technology is so economical, there is untapped potential to utilize HA in the System i community."

Today's High Availability solutions can be controlled with only minutes of work each day to ensure the highest level of productivity—this means COMMON members can now take control over downtime.

Vision Solutions has sought out the marketplace and successfully delivered state-of-the-art solutions to help companies of all sizes enjoy the benefits of HA and DR. Their products include ORION™, MIMIX® and iTERA™

HA award-winning solutions. "Our iTERA HA product is the number one selling product in the SMB marketplace today," Alan says.

Vision Solutions has intelligently navigated the High Availability marketplace in order to provide customers with the best and most extensive products and

service offerings. With mergers and an acquisition, Vision Solutions managed to integrate both technology and customers successfully. "We'll bring more than 20 major enhancements to our products throughout 2008 and we're working with IBM to support their improvements."

Alan is quick to remind our members that Vision Solutions did not become number one overnight. "It continues to be a process of careful planning and strategic moves," says Alan. "We have great appreciation for the customer base and each step we take means more enhancements and improved technology for users."

Vision Solutions enjoys an extensive global business partner program in more than 70 countries. With 6,500 customers worldwide and numerous, one-of-a-kind patents for their products, Vision Solutions has the ability to match products perfectly to meet their clients' needs.

"Vision Solutions has the experience and solutions that companies of all sizes seek," adds Alan. "COMMON members can learn more about Vision Solutions this week, especially how to take advantage of Vision Solutions ever-expanding product offerings."

Make sure to stop by Vision Solutions in booth number 405 to discuss your opportunities and visit Vision Solutions online at [www.visionsolutions.com](http://www.visionsolutions.com). 



Alan Arnold



## Vision Solutions Speakers at the COMMON 2008 Annual Meeting & Exposition:

**21GE (Monday 8:00 am - 9:15 am)**

V6R1: Logical Replication or Storage Based Mirroring: Which One Is Right For You? (**Dave Brown**)

**41GE (Thursday 8:00 am - 9:15 am)**

Where is High Availability Heading - The New Vision Solutions (**Doug Piper**)

**54GG (Thursday 12:30 pm - 1:45 pm)**

Achieving "Hands Free" Operations - 90% of Downtime is Planned: Learn How to Avoid it (**Dave Brown**)



# Best Practices for Choosing a Web Application Development Tool for the System i and Beyond

By Heather Gately

**R**esearching software solutions can be challenging, particularly when you are entering the Web application arena. Before diving into a product evaluation, you want to make sure the vendors who are courting you can give you what you actually need. Many products appear under the heading of application development, but they are a wide and varied lot, so asking the right questions can be crucial to your long-term happiness. Unfortunately, sometimes knowing exactly what to ask is the hard part.

So, today we'll cover some of the best practices for selecting an application development tool for creating data-driven IBM® System i Web applications, and provide a checklist of the most important questions to ask your potential vendors. Here's what you need to consider:



## Ease of Use and Training

Who is going to be using this tool?

- What skill sets are required to be productive with the solution? Will your users be required to learn a language in order to use the tool? What kind of learning curve can you expect?
- What kind of training is required to get up to speed, and how much does this training cost?
- Can this tool be useful to, or used by, departments outside IT? (Where can you get the most bang for your buck? How extensive are its capabilities?)

Many tools require highly technical users to learn their proprietary development language, like a 4GL (fourth-generation language) with learning curves upwards of six weeks to become productive. Other tools, like IDEs, require users to learn a development

language such as PHP or Java. This language training can take 6–24 months to reach productivity. However, there are also solutions that don't require any language training that can allow a wide range of users at all skill-levels to be productive and begin producing Web applications right away.

**Real World Example:** Take the case of two rival businesses in a race to develop e-commerce sites. Company A selects a 4GL-based application development tool. Company B selects a Web application development tool that does not require any language training. In two weeks, with a week of training, Company B has developed their e-commerce site, securely tied to their enterprise system, and begins rolling it out to select customers, bringing in scores of new sales their first week. Company A's employees, at this point, still have three more weeks of 4GL language training to go before they can even start developing, giving Company B the definitive advantage.

**Best Practice:** Take training times and learning curves into account when looking at overall timeframes and productivity.



### Capabilities

If the basic version doesn't meet your needs and you must purchase an add-on module, how much will these additional add-on modules cost in the long-run?

- Does the tool you are evaluating allow you to integrate with your business's packaged solutions, such as ERPs, CRMs, MRPs and the like?
- Can you incorporate tried and true business code and logic or complex calculations/algorithms into your new Web applications? How does the tool you are evaluating allow you to accomplish this?
- Do you have any applications written in a third-party reporting software or reports hand-coded in an older language like RPG or COBOL? Will you be stuck starting these over from scratch?

Complex learning curves don't necessarily mean comprehensive solutions. Make sure your needs are covered in the long term.

**Real World Example:** Company A wanted to modernize their reports, most of which were written in Query/400. The vendor they were speaking with was equipped to automatically, and seemingly inexpensively, bring them to the Web. But, on further review Company A also had a number of critical reports that had been written in third-party software. Their new vendor couldn't modernize those reports. Those would all need to be re-written from scratch requiring a large-scale expensive consulting project. Company A discovered this "good deal" wasn't a good fit after all. Unfortunately, it was after they had paid large sums to upgrade their hardware and purchased the tool.



IBM® System i™

**Best Practice:** Make a laundry list of what you want to accomplish now, and include those development projects that seem far off on the horizon. Ask potential vendors how you might practically accomplish these long-term goals with each solution because all tools are not created equal. Making sure you ask the right questions up front

can save you a lot of headaches (and money) in the end.



### Technical Requirements

Where will the application development tool live? Does it have to live on your System i, or could it run elsewhere? What about the applications you create with this tool?

- Do you have data stored in any non-DB2 databases? If so, you often need to purchase additional adapters. How much will those cost?



# Replacing Query/400?

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### Act 1 - "The Elevator"

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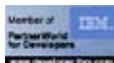
## Randall Munson

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- What kind of processor upgrade or memory upgrade combinations will your system require to run this solution? How much will *those* cost?
- What is the application development tool's architecture? What about the applications it produces? What language are the applications coded in?

Your users need applications that work, and work better than the ones they had before. Performance is key, and the choices you make can greatly affect that. Whether they are accessing the application from their cell phone, a dial-up, or a T1, they expect sub-second response time, and the choices you make based on your solution's technical requirements can greatly affect both performance and cost.

**Real World Example:** Company A selects a seemingly inexpensive Web application development tool that can only run on their System i. In order to run the tool, Company A will need upgrades to their System i processor and memory that add up well into five figures. Company B selects a tool with a higher price tag that can be served from a wide variety of hardware including their System i™. Company B has similar hardware restrictions to Company A, but avoids added hardware costs by serving their tool from a less expensive, more efficient setup on a Linux server, effectively saving them tens of thousands of dollars, and providing a faster solution for a lower overall cost.

**Best Practice:** Make sure you factor in the technical requirements before you make your final decision. Some application development tools, even seemingly simple report-writer or query tools, can require large demands on your current hardware and infrastructure.



### Deployment

How do you feel about exposing your System i to the Web?

- Can you deploy and serve your new Web applications from another server?
- Are there costs associated with deploying to another server? If you need to move your Web application to a new server, will you need to re-develop or re-compile your application? Will you need to pay run-time fees?

If you are planning on serving your applications from the System i, you need to consider whether you are comfortable exposing it to the Web. Many tools require you to do this. If that is not something you are comfortable with, you need to look at the solution vendors that allow you to deploy and serve your applications elsewhere, whether it's a second IBM e-Server, or a Windows or Linux server.

**Real World Example:** Company A has decided to create a system of Web applications to allow their suppliers to access



invoices, pay bills, and order products online, but they don't want to expose their System i to the Web, so they decide they want to serve their applications from another server. The vendor they have chosen charges run-time fees to deploy their applications to another platform, making their new venture cost-prohibitive, and Company A unable to affordably provide this solution.

**Best Practice:** Look for platform flexibility if you are looking for a long-term solution, and select a tool that doesn't require run-time fees to keep your long-term costs down.



### Maintenance

Once my applications are built, what do I need to do to maintain them? Will I require help from the software vendor to maintain them long-term?

- How are upgrades handled? Will upgrades to my solution cause me to have difficulties supporting the applications I've already built?
- If my vendor stopped supporting my application development tool, or went out of business, how would I maintain my applications built with their solution?

Selecting a software tool that creates stand-alone applications in an open and accessible software language is an important consideration when addressing long-term maintenance.

**Real World Example:** Company A purchases a Web application development tool, and develops an entire system of Web applications over the course of five years. Their custom applications, crucial to their daily business, are written in code that was proprietary to their tool vendor. When Company A's vendor stops supporting their tool, Company A has no way to update, modify, or maintain their slew of applications because they are written in their vendor's unsupported language. They are left in the dust. At the same time, Company B's tool vendor goes out of business. The difference is, Company B's tool wrote applications in industry-standard code, so their applications are modifiable and maintainable long-term, by any outside developer, so their solutions live on well into the future.

**Best Practice:** Choosing an application development tool that creates business applications in supportable languages (without proprietary ties) means that in the long-term an independent developer can come in to maintain, or modify these applications, no matter what happens to the vendor or tool along the way.



### Pricing

How does the pricing work? Is the pricing per-seat, or a pricing model that is simplified to include unlimited users? How does this affect the price, when taking

into account the number of employees I have?

- What is the cost of the most basic software, and what additional modules might I have to pay for either now or in the future? How do additional modules affect hardware and performance considerations?
- What is the annual maintenance fee, and what does that include? Does it include support? Does it include unlimited upgrades?

Some tools require additional modules to tie into your ERP, schedule or distribute reports, query database management systems, create datamarts, etc. How much will the additional components you require cost?

**Real World Example:** Companies A and B are both concerned about their budgets. Company A looks at the price tags of their vendor options, and goes with the one with the obviously lower price tag. But, Company A requires

“plug-in” modules and their vendor has required upfront maintenance charges for each module, which raises the price by tens of thousands of dollars (annually). Suddenly a price tag that looked like a few thousand dollars has ballooned to a six-figure gotcha. Company B, on the other hand, selects a vendor with a higher initial price tag, but because their vendor has unlimited users and all-inclusive capabilities, with optional maintenance costs, their initial price that seemed steeper prices out for a much lower total cost of ownership.

**Best Practice:** Carefully examine pricing structures. Software vendors are not in business to give away their software for free, and they find many ways to line their pockets. Per-seat or per-developer licensing, particularly when coupled with modules, can turn what once looked like a cost-effective solution of a few thousand dollars, into a six-figure monster. Asking the right questions up front can save your budgets long-term.



## Support and Track Record

Who is the vendor? How long have they been in business? What kind of support do they offer? Hours of service?

- Can you talk to their current customers and find out if they are happy with the solution?
- If the basic version doesn't meet your needs and you must purchase an add-on module, is the module from a partner, or the company... and who will provide support?

One way to test a company's support mettle is in their support of software trials. How are the support questions handled there? Are your questions responded to with timely and complete answers? How seriously does the company take their support?

**Best Practice:** Good vendors can show you indicators of how quickly they handle support calls, and keep metrics of their support record. Ask to see their dashboard of recent support call records, and how they were handled.

Booth 534

# Where has your data been? Where is your data going? Where is your data now? Who is watching it?

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## Primary Goals and Other Important Long-Term Considerations

Are you interested in one or two applications, or a long-term solution? Does the tool vendor offer consulting or mentoring to work with your long-term goals?

- How do you feel about being tied to a proprietary solution? Would you be more comfortable with an open solution?
- With this tool can you give administrators the proper security or the ability to limit data views based on authorization?
- Are users required to run their applications from the tool's development environment, or are their new solutions stand-alone Web applications they can access from their browser?
- What about scalability? As your company grows, both in users, and in applications, what kind of stress will that put on your system?

**Best Practice:** Look for the application development tool that isn't purchased for your business today, but purchased for your business tomorrow, meaning that it not only fits your needs, but allows for growth and usability beyond your initial project.



## Closing Thoughts

When choosing your application development tool, it is important to remember, the only constant is change. The best case scenario is growth, whether that's customers, end-users, or development seats. How will this affect your needs and bottom line long term? Mergers and acquisitions and new decision makers can quickly change the scope of platforms and technology. How would the solution you've chosen be affected if you moved off your current platform a year from now? What about the applica-

tions you created? Could you just point them to the new platform, or would they need re-development?

Lastly, perhaps the most important best practice for selecting a Web application development tool is to have a clear goal in mind before embarking on your journey. The more you clarify your own needs, both short-term and long-term, the more application development vendors and consultants can provide you with the right solution fit for your business, both today and well into the future. 

## About the Author Heather Gately

lives in Chicago and works at mrc ([www.mrc-productivity.com](http://www.mrc-productivity.com)). She is a regular contributor to IT industry publications, newsletters, industry blogs and System i Trend articles. mrc is the producer of the Web application development software tool: m-Power ([www.mrc-productivity.com/products/](http://www.mrc-productivity.com/products/)).



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# Message from Ross Mauri



It's been a real pleasure in recent months to get to know many members of the worldwide IBM® System i™ community. Your energy and enthusiasm are awesome and unique. I'm looking forward to meeting many more of you at the COMMON Annual Meeting and Exposition in Nashville and other gatherings throughout 2008.

This is an exciting time for all of us working with System i. The release of i5/OS® V6R1 marks another major milestone in the 20-year progression of this platform. With many new options for storage virtualization, disk clustering, encryption for backups, breakthrough Java™ performance, and support for POWER6™ processors and IBM BladeCenter®; i5/OS V6R1 throws the doors wide open to further innovation, and can help you achieve maximum return on your IT investments.

Recommendations and guidance from your representatives on the COMMON Americas and Europe Advisory Councils were very important in helping us get this latest release of i5/OS just right. I'd like to thank the members of the advisory councils for their commitment, their expertise, and for the time they spent volunteering on this project. It's that kind of collaboration, I believe, that makes for success—not just in terms of developing new products—but in finding imaginative new ways to apply advanced technology to your business requirements.

The agenda for the COMMON meeting in Nashville promises another great opportunity for sharing ideas and insights across the community. For those of you who plan to attend, I invite you to join **Mark Shearer** and I at a special IBM town hall meeting on Wednesday April 2, where we will make a special announcement of an important initiative, "The New Power Equation." I hope to see you there.

All of us at IBM appreciate your business and your confidence in System i. We will continue to do our best to earn them every day.

Ross A. Mauri

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ross".

General Manager, IBM Power Systems



# COMMON Education Foundation Impacts Future IT Professionals



**Dustin Greelis** is a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He is majoring in Computer Science and currently has a 3.2 GPA. Dustin realized early on that to be successful in college he needed to learn many skills besides those directly related to his major—skills of adaptability, integrity, and personal responsibility. He's now working on skills such as analytical thinking, research, and leadership. He realizes that all the things he learns throughout college will affect the way he lives his life in the future. These skills will keep him on the road to success.



**Christin Hall** is an RPG programmer and holds associate degrees from Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC) in computer programming and information systems. She is working toward her bachelor's in software engineering at Florida State University. She is a member of the Information Technology Faculty Advisory Board at GTCC and a student member of Association for Computing Machinery (ACM). Her interests include: reading, animal rights/welfare, physical fitness/healthy living, and Florida State Seminoles/NFL football.



**Joseph Lessard** grew up in Rochester, MN where he was involved in the 4-H program, when he earned two trips to the state fair. He received a blue ribbon both times. He built his own computer for one trip and he wrote a C++ program for the other trip. He is now a computer science major at Colorado State University. He plans to be involved in the computer science industry for as long as his fingers can type.



**David Nakashian** is currently enrolled at Rutgers: The State University of New Jersey. He earned a 3.0 GPA last semester and feels he is going to maintain that. As well as concentrating on his studies, he enjoys participating in intramural sports, such as soccer and basketball. He also enjoys watching all sports and attending the Rutgers' team events, especially the football games.



**Amanda Walsh** is a junior at Central Michigan University. She majors in General Business Administration and also studies pre-optometry. Her current GPA is 3.81 and she describes herself as a hard worker and dedicated student. She's worked for JP Morgan Chase the past two summers and is also learning Web development. She thinks IT is extremely important and thanks the Common Education Foundation for supporting the development of IT.

## CEF

By Michelle August

**T**he COMMON Education Foundation is a non-profit organization with the purpose of fostering the development and growth of future IT professionals. This is accomplished through scholarships and educational opportunities for both IT students and their instructors. Students can apply for a \$1,000 tuition reimbursement scholarship and can attend COMMON conferences at a greatly reduced registration rate. Instructors can apply for a scholarship to attend a COMMON conference or to attend IBM Summer School. Please visit [www.common.org/foundation/index.html#scholarships](http://www.common.org/foundation/index.html#scholarships) for more information about any of our scholarship opportunities.

There were 11 professors from different colleges across the country that received registration scholarships to attend the 2007 Annual conference and we awarded five tuition reimbursement scholarships. The students receiving the tuition reimbursement scholarships are recognized on this page.

The applicants for the tuition reimbursement scholarship must be recommended by a COMMON member, attend an accredited institution of higher education (two or four year college or graduate program), and submit a completed application with their sponsor's signature, an essay, a letter of recommendation from one of their professors, and an official transcript.

The 2008 deadline is August 1. If you are interested in recommending a student, you can download the application at [www.common.org/pdfs/tuitionapp.pdf](http://www.common.org/pdfs/tuitionapp.pdf).

These scholarship opportunities are made possible by the generosity of our supporters, the COMMON members. In order for our efforts to continue, we need to ask for your continued support.

There are several ways that you could help shape the future of our IT professionals: donate items to our silent auction as an individual, encourage your LUG to take part in the LUG Challenge (by donating items), bid on items at the auction, buy raffle tickets at the nightly iSocials, purchase COMMON apparel, try your hand at our miniature golf station, volunteer some of your time to help staff the CEF booth, or just share your ideas with us to help make this organization even better. Please e-mail Executive Director, **Michelle August** ([michelle\\_august@common.org](mailto:michelle_august@common.org)) if you would like more information about any of these activities and be sure to stop by the CEF booth in Nashville!



Michelle August

# Wise Foods: Strategic Migration from Legacy Environment Leads to E-Commerce Breakthrough

By Steve Rosen

**F**or many companies, the challenge of implementing and managing business-to-business e-commerce relationships is not new at all. But executives in these organizations often face subtle and complicated challenges as they take technologies like EDI to the next level. The reason: entrenched and established technologies, business procedures and relationships must be scrutinized and changed, creating discomfort and even resistance if the process is not properly managed. But change is inevitable in the world of electronic commerce because:



- Business strategies often evolve to respond to new marketplace realities; and
- New technological developments create opportunities to introduce operational efficiencies that have strategic implications.

That was the situation facing Neil Bixler, Director of MIS at Wise Foods Inc., as he evaluated his e-business infrastructure options.

## Legacy Systems a Byproduct of M&A Activity

Founded in 1921, Wise Foods is now the largest regional snack food company in the United States, manufacturing and distributing its products—like Wise Potato Chips, Cheez Doodles, Cottage Fries, New York Deli, Waffies, and Krunchers—primarily on the east coast. (The company continues to expand West beyond Ohio, and has a growing



presence in Alabama, Texas, and other western states.)

Since its inception, the company has been through a number of mergers and acquisitions (Borden in 1964, KKR in 1995 and Palladium Equity Partners in 2000). While the Wise brand and culture has remained largely intact throughout this period, each change of ownership brought with it operational and management implications, as different parts of the company were kept or released based on the specific interests of the parent corporation.

Wise itself began taking business advantage of electronic commerce in the 1970s when it established peer-to-peer data exchanges with major customers using magnetic tapes. In the early 1980s, Borden implemented standards-based EDI technology with large retailers, which created the op-

portunity for Wise to gain economies of scale benefits by consolidating its billing processes with sister Borden companies.

As a result of this initiative, Borden created an in-house service organization called Resource Partners, to support the EDI needs of all Borden companies, including Wise.

But during the KKR divestiture of the Borden companies (which eventually saw Wise land with Palladium Equity Partners in 2000) Resource Partner was sold to another company to become an entity separate and distinct from Wise. With its former “in-house” resource now an outside vendor, Wise found itself forced to pay what an analysis showed to be exorbitant costs for EDI. Service levels were poor and that had a direct impact on Wise’s ability to conduct business.

*“Whenever we wanted to add a new partner it was a slow, painful thing. If we wanted to create a new transaction or add a new transaction it was very painful and costly.”*



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Moreover, it was clear that we now had an added point of failure because there were software, systems, and communications issues we could not control or manage.” – Neil Bixler, Director of MIS, Wise Foods, Inc.

This was especially true since Wise had replaced its legacy systems with new System i platforms running JD Edwards Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) applications. A business case to bring EDI capabilities into the Wise MIS operation was thus formed.

However, a major challenge lay ahead: convincing key internal audiences—including the interim management team and some members of the board of directors—that the business case was strong enough to justify making significant changes on how Wise processed tens of millions of dollars worth of electronic transactions.

Bixler and his team put together an analysis of the issues associated with moving EDI capabilities in house, and were able to support the conclusion that the company would save a minimum of \$100,000 per year by implementing an appropriate solution.

### Characteristics of the Solution

The first point of consideration for Wise was to find solutions that operated in the System i environment. While there were many PC EDI applications on the market that claimed to support the mid-range platform, Bixler wanted a native System i solution.

“I’ve always felt that the closer you are to the source of the data, the fewer points of failure you’re going to have. As I looked at the market for EDI translators and mappers, I felt that the PC-based products were not secure or stable enough to handle the type of volume we were doing. I mean, we were billing between \$50 and \$60 million via EDI at that time. I had already made a commitment to the System i platform because I concluded it is one of the most stable boxes out there. Today we have four times the trading partners and

have expanded EDI transactions for orders and invoices to inventory movement, vendor managed inventory, remittances, and price confirmation.” – Wise Foods’ Bixler

### The Bottom Line

As a result of this strategic migration, Wise Foods has expanded its trading partner base, improved the efficiency of the entire supply chain, accelerated cash flow, and decreased the costs of EDI services by nearly \$100K per year. Moreover, the EXTOL-based EDI implementation has allowed Wise Foods to engage in price synchronization initiatives (using a service called viaLink).

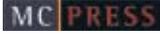
“We now synchronize pricing with two major retailers (Nice N Easy and Winn-Dixie) and are currently in negotiation with Kmart. And, our Extol mapper allowed us to become the first of 50 companies to register our items through !SYNC to Wal-Mart... this too we will expand to Food Lion, Ahold, Shaw’s, and many more as they subscribe to !SYNC.” – Wise Foods’ Bixler

### About the Author

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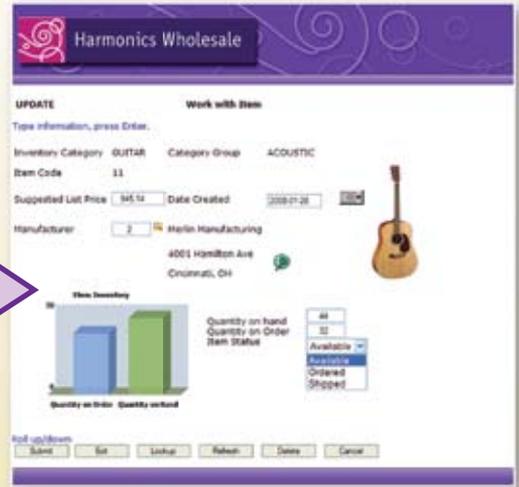
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