

With the Merger of i and p, What Happens to IBM Customer Support?

By Anne Lucas, COMMON's Advocacy Program Manager

There was an air of excitement at COMMON's Annual Meeting as the IBM POWER server® announcement was made. For years, we heard IBM allude to the merging of hardware platforms, and now it's a reality. One CIO commented, "This is great for business. IBM just provided me with more options for my business."

While IBM and many of its most dedicated users were touting the advantages of this new organization, some of the COMMON attendees and many loyal IBM AS/400®, iSeries®, and System i™ users were asking the question: "How might this change customer service?"

For years the AS/400, iSeries, and System i support team provided its users with the industry's "gold standard" user support. Would IBM change the very successful support process and infrastructure that those users have come to love? If so, how might those changes affect us as users?

COMMON's Leadership and Advocacy Team (L/A Team) decided to dive into the merger of System i™ and System p™ user care and support. Have no fear System i users—your System i support will be stronger than ever. The remainder of this article is what COMMON's L/A Team learned from IBM's Power System Customer Care Team.

For years the System i support team provided a level of support unique in the industry and unique within IBM. The integrated support team, located in Rochester, provides support for all aspects of the System i solution. This includes core hardware and operating system offerings and extends into other products

offered by IBM; for example, storage and SWG products. This integrated support mirrors the integrated hardware and software philosophy that has been a core value proposition since the beginning of the AS/400.



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The success of this approach was recognized by the Service and Support Professionals Association (SSPA), a leading industry Association for IT support professionals. Three STAR Awards were presented over the past three years to the System i business support team in the areas of sustained performance, metrics and business intelligence, and customer commitment. This industry award recognizes the best of the best when it comes to providing user support and can be seen as recognition of twenty years of excellence.


With the Power System reorganization announced in January, the following two changes were rolled out to the user care service teams organizations. First, both the System i and System p technical support organizations (along with the additional IBM Systems and Technology Group support teams, such as Storage, System x, and System z) now report to

Walt Ling, Vice President Post-Sales Technical Support, IBM Systems and Technology Group. While the reporting structure changes, the System i team remains an autonomous team within Ling's organization. Therefore, the existing processes and levels of support are not changing. In fact, with access to a broader and deeper set of STG technical skills, the System i team can be even more responsive to its users. In addition, the System i and System p teams have already begun to explore best practices between the groups.

The team recognizes that client service expectations vary across the System i and System p user communities and understands the importance of providing levels of support consistent with those expectations. Comparing and adopting best practices allows the support teams to improve the level of support by discovering more efficient and effective processes for the System i and System p users. The merging of these support organizations also enables a sharper focus on strategic initiatives. The team is already looking at delivering support utilizing the latest Web 2.0 technologies. With a single view across all products, they are able to leverage more consistent client self-assist technology, electronic problem submission, and new tools including live chat support.

The second customer service-related organizational change was the consolidation of System i and System p Quality and Client Satisfaction management under **John Manasso**, Director of IBM Power Systems Client Care. This team includes the Client Satisfaction Project Offices who help drive resolution of critical client problems, when they occur. Similar to the support teams approach, John and his teams are working to implement the best of both the System i and System p approaches to managing client care. Reacting to the questions raised by the COMMON users, Manasso had this to say: "From an end-to-end quality and satisfaction perspective, the latest Power Systems products have been nothing short of a complete success. We have a very positive track record on both our System i and System p teams with a reputation of dedicated focus on our clients. We expect the integration of our processes and outstanding people,

combined with our excellent product performance, to drive even higher levels of satisfaction for System i and p clients.”

Given all of this, the question remains: when the dust settles on these organizational changes, where is the typical System i user? The positive impact these changes will have on the System i community was summed up by Walt Ling, who has over 25 years of experience with the System i community (most of which was in support and client care capacities): “The high level of support and the resulting extraordinary levels of satisfaction that the System i Client Care team delivered are very well understood by me and within IBM, in general. This new organization allows us to leverage an even larger set of resources and bring more energy to issues that affect our client set. I fully expect previous levels of support to be continued and, in fact, expect users of all STG products to see improved levels of service as a result of these changes.” 

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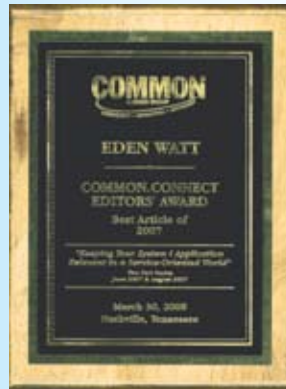
COMMON.CONNECT Editors' Choice Award

By Vaughn Dragland



Eden Watt

The COMMON.CONNECT Editors' Choice Award for the best article of 2007 was announced at the COMMON Annual Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. In order to be nominated for this award, an article had to satisfy some or all of the following criteria: interesting to readers, relevance to the System i community, technical merit, educational value, readability & visual content, originality, humor, and style. The article must be an original submission, not a reprint. COMMON staff members are not eligible. This year's winner is **Eden Watt** (Services Director at Lansa Inc.) for her article “*Keeping Your System i Applications Relevant in a Service-Oriented World*” (which appeared as a two-part series in the June 2007 & August 2007 issues of COMMON.CONNECT).



The Runner-Up is **Saima Latif** for her article “*System i Telephony at FIDM*” (April 2007 issue).

Honorable Mention goes to **Nikki Jensen** for her article “*How to Evaluate a Web Application Development Tool*” (October 2007 issue).

Many thanks to all of the authors who contribute to COMMON.CONNECT. Without you there would be no magazine. — Vaughn

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