



The Road to **Modernization**



IBM experts debunk common myths that hold clients back

BY EVE DANIELS

H

ow many of us have taken a road trip that wasn't quite the vacation we pictured? We saved money, studied the maps and set out for an amazing adventure. But a few days into the trip, it started to rain and wouldn't let up. We took the wrong exit and got a flat tire. The motel bed gave us a backache.

It's funny how dreams of the perfect vacation can quickly give way to reality—and we find ourselves asking, "Are we there yet?"

The same can be said for IBM i enterprise modernization. No matter where you're heading, you're going to experience some ups and downs. As you move forward, it always helps to maintain a positive and realistic outlook. Three IBM i experts—Mike Cain, Tim Rowe and Scott Forstie—help debunk some of the myths surrounding modernization.

Myth 1: It's purely a technical problem.

The meaning of enterprise modernization all depends on who you ask. For some companies, it means improving the user interface or refactoring a database. Others need to code new programs or new applications. But in all cases, it's not just about filling a technology need. Ultimately, you're addressing a larger business need.

"To meet new and changing requirements, to stay relevant as an IT shop, to continue to provide value to your organization, you need to embark on enterprise modernization," says Mike Cain, team leader of the DB2* for i Center of Excellence, IBM. "And to do that, you have to start with a business conversation."

Cain and his team help facilitate those conversations with clients worldwide. One of the most popular topics of discussion lately is big data. Everyone's talking about it, says Cain, but not a lot of customers understand how to tackle it from a business angle. Not all companies realize that handling big data requires a modern enterprise.

"We start by defining what it is in the context of the four Vs (volume, velocity, variety and veracity)," says Cain. "During that conversation, many customers discover that they're not in a position to take advantage of this trend. They might have a big data problem, but no wherewithal to work on it. That's when they realize they need to modernize."

Whether you're dealing with a data problem or something else, it's essential to start with a strategic roadmap. You also need buy-in from everyone involved in the effort, from developers to CEOs. Together, you must define and articulate the company's goals and priorities, as well as examine opportunities for change and the advantages to making that change.

You also need a champion to keep the momentum going. The ideal candidates are organized and tenacious. They're good project managers, communicators and negotiators who believe that the end goal is worth pursuing.

"In addition to modernizing your technology, you have to modernize your approach to dealing with colleagues in other parts of the business," he adds. "So more and more, people are recognizing the importance of communicating eloquently and credibly to all stakeholders."

Myth 2: We need to start over.

Out with the old, in with the new. While that's one approach to modernization, it's not necessarily the most strategic. All

too often, companies "throw out the baby with the bathwater" because they aren't aware of the modern capabilities of their existing systems.

"It's not that the system itself is outdated, but that people perceive that system as being old," says Tim Rowe, an IBM business architect who specializes in application development and systems management for IBM i.

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Rowe admits that the long service life of IBM i can be a double-edged sword. Many clients have been successfully using the same development practices and versions of the database for years, without being forced to make updates.

Eventually, many decision makers get tired of looking old, so they invest in a whole new platform on which to run their business. "They spend a lot of time and money, only to run into problems and limitations as they chase that new bell and whistle," he explains.

Rather than starting over, you're likely to achieve greater ROI by modernizing the tools you currently have in place. But first, you or your colleagues might benefit from some education on what those existing technologies can do.

Perhaps you have a team of RPG programmers in your company who use native database access. But did you know they also have SQL database access on DB2 for i? "Both are robust, and both have good reasons to use one over the other," notes Scott Forstie, DB2 for i business architect and SQL team leader, IBM. "That's something that's unique to our database and not as widely understood."

Using ISV tools and modern languages like PHP or Ruby on Rails are both great ways to modernize without starting over, says Rowe. "You can quickly and easily write PHP applications and run them natively on IBM i. Leverage the investment you've made in your hardware platform and take advantage of the support that's already there."

Ultimately, if you want to be smart about enterprise modernization, you need to start by looking at the options in front of you. "There are a lot of ways to move forward without throwing away what you've already built," Forstie adds.

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Myth 3: It's a one-time thing.

Enterprise modernization is more than a single event. It's a sequence of actions. As noted in a recent IBM Redbooks* publication, modernization is "a process of rethinking how to approach the creation and maintenance of applications"—the keyword being process.

Sure, tangible benefits will be realized along the way, such as a more modern UI like a Web browser or better access to applications from a mobile device. But it doesn't end there. Stated another way, says Cain, "Modernization provides a foundation that continues to pay forward both in

something different, and throwing more hardware at it doesn't solve the problem."

From the database perspective, the solution typically involves targeted modernization and reengineering. Specifically, that means modernizing your company's current database structures to meet requirements and minimize the impact on existing applications. And that often begins with consulting, education and proof of concept.

In the course of the process, Cain says he's seen even the most skeptical of clients begin to embrace modernization. "In many cases, we're enhancing their application design and development

the years, they've helped thousands of businesses large and small with these efforts. And each time those customers have increased productivity and reduced long-term costs.

"We still have customers who grew up in that AS/400* world and they've been able to stay in that world, but they need to figure out how to make the move," explains Rowe. "You just need to take the time to do it and once you've done it, you'll be running modern applications on a modern hardware platform—one of the most secure platforms in the industry."

Moreover, companies that don't move forward have difficulty hiring and retaining talent. According to Rowe, today's workforce expects a certain usability experience. "It's going to be harder and harder to find people who will want to work on something old and clunky. If you move toward a more intuitive interface, it attracts new people and saves you on training."

Of course, the user interface is just one of many milestones on the 'road trip' of modernization. "It's much deeper than that," says Rowe. "It's not only modernizing the external appearance of things. It's also modernizing your mindset."



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terms of the science and art, as well as the ability to be more agile, flexible and scalable."

To illustrate, Cain points to a common scenario: "Maybe a company's legacy applications are working fine, but the company is growing by leaps and bounds with new products and services. As the data and number of users and transactions grow, those applications do not scale up and no longer meet performance requirements. They need to do

expertise with modern tools and techniques, so they start to feel more empowered."

While modernization is a multidimensional process, that doesn't mean it has to take a long time. In fact, asking the right business questions and developing a targeted plan tends to make it go faster.

Myth 4: It costs too much.

Can't afford to modernize? All three experts say you can't afford not to. Over

Embracing Modernization

A modern mindset is also applied to family trips. These days, nearly every person on the trip will have a mobile device (or several) and be providing real-time input on navigation, weather, news, and most importantly, food options. Aren't we all better off by embracing technology on these trips? That same zest will provide ROI and smiles in the data center when you embrace modernization. ☺

Eve Daniels is a Minneapolis-based freelance writer.