



## AiM—System i to .NET Framework

*ERP provider experiencing significant order activity increase with move from System i to Microsoft .NET Framework.*

### Quick Take

#### PROBLEM

The IBM System i platform limited AiM's ability to attract new customers and increase its market share.

#### SOLUTION

With the help of Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner ASNA, AiM migrated its solution code from System i to the Microsoft .NET Framework.

#### RESULTS

- Migration savings of 50 percent
- Customer training time reduced
- Customer order activity expected to increase more than 100 percent

### Customer

AiM Software, located in Solihull, England, provides enterprise resource planning (ERP) software solutions with 23 modules, focusing on the manufacturing and distribution markets.

### Challenge

AiM developed its software for the IBM® AS/400®—now System i™—market. When System i faded as a popular business platform, AiM needed to follow its market.

“The AS/400 had started to lose its way in the latter part of the 1990s,” says Jon Dean, Technical Director at AiM Software. “The technology and user interface were perceived to be outdated and the marketing momentum was slowing.” By 2000, it was clear to Dean and his colleagues that they needed to revisit, and revise, their platform technology strategy.

AiM's ERP solution included more than 10,000 programs consisting of more than 2 million lines of RPG code. This was a massive software base and AiM was concerned that any migration to a new platform would be expensive and risky.

The company wanted to offer alternative platforms—but couldn't afford to simply abandon the 10-year investment it had in code for that platform.

The company looked at solutions including “on-the-fly screen scrapers” and front-end redevelopment with IBM WebSphere while still using the same backend software and servers.

*“By migrating our product to .NET, we're seeing new customers, more customers, more sales, and more ways to do business. From both business and technology standpoints, the migration is proving to be a complete success.”*

Jon Dean, Technical Director at AiM Software

But none of these solutions fully met AiM's needs, as they required the continued presence of the System i on the backend, the complete retraining or replacement of AiM's software development staff, loss of control over its solution as development was passed to offshore resources, or exorbitant investments that mitigated the financial benefits of moving to the fast-growing portion of the market.

## ASNA Solution

ASNA offered a series of software tools and solutions for migrating AiM's ERP solution to the .NET Framework, which would free AiM from System i, leverage its investment in RPG code, and produce a robust solution.

"The attraction of the ASNA tools was their ability to enable us to use our existing programming logic and source code in the .NET environment," says Dean.

Using Monarch, ASNA's modernization tool, AiM developed a roadmap to first migrate small, less complex applications in its ERP solution and then move on to more complex applications with 12,000 lines of code or more. AiM first migrated 2 of its 23 modules to perfect its migration process. For example, the AiM developers learned that performing some "mass change" pre-migration work to the original code—such as removing unused constants, fields, headings, and function keys—would more fully automate the migration process.

The migration process was largely completed in eight months. After that, AiM reviewed its .NET RPG code using Visual Studio® 2005 Professional Edition to adjust the look and feel of some of the screens. "The functionality came through Monarch 100 percent," says Dean. "The last step for us was refining the presentation."

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Jon Dean, Technical Director at AiM Software

## Project Benefits

By migrating its solution to the .NET Framework, AiM expects its order rate to double within a year, can offer its solution to new markets, and it can consider new, more profitable business models, such as "software as a service." In addition, by using ASNA tools, the migration time and cost were significantly less.

**Migration Savings of 50 Percent:** The migration was not only fast—given the application size—taking only 8 months for 20 of the 23 modules, it was cost-effective too. The migration was accomplished largely by a single developer with a manager assisting part-time. That enabled AiM to save 50 percent of the €400,000 it would have spent to do the same evaluation process and core migration using an alternative approach.

Moreover, by continuing to take advantage of its mature RPG code in the .NET Framework environment, rather than having to recreate its code from scratch, AiM extended the return on its investment in that code, and avoided an additional investment to debug and perfect new code. This process also enabled AiM to retain control of the migration project in-house.

**Customer Training Time Reduced:** It takes customers less time to train on the new, .NET-based version of AiM ERP software because the user interface has the familiar look and feel of Windows, rather than the less-intuitive "green screens" of System i.

AiM customers also gain other benefits from the new, .NET-based ERP software that go beyond the easier interface, such as a more flexible work environment and integration with other Microsoft technologies.

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**Customer Order Activity Up More than 100 Percent:** Within months of announcing the new version of its ERP software to the market, Dean says that the company has already seen a significant increase in order activity. He expects the customer order rate to more than double within the next 12 months, in part because customers now can acquire AiM ERP software and deploy it on their existing Windows-based hardware, rather than having to acquire System i hardware specifically for the ERP deployment.

Migrating to .NET isn't just in the business interest of AiM's customers; it's in AiM's interest as well. The move is enabling the company to move away from the low-margin business of selling System i hardware, and to focus on the more lucrative software portion of its business. It also enables AiM to consider providing its solution in a "software as a service" model, for which the Microsoft .NET Framework is better suited than other operating environments.

"By migrating our product to the Microsoft .NET environment, we're seeing new customers, more customers, more sales, and more ways to do business," says Dean. "From both business and technology standpoints, the migration is proving to be a complete success."