Newsletters	Subscriptions	Forums	Career	Media Kit	About Us	Contact	Search	Home

THE FOUR HUNDRED
iSeries and AS/400 Insight

Volume 25, Number 15 -- March 16, 2015

IBM i Shops Turn To MSPs For Help

Published: March 16, 2015

by Dan Burger

Companies are looking to MSPs to help them obtain operational efficiencies and increased value from their IT investments. I wouldn't call it a hive of activity, but there are more frequent indicators of shops wanting to consolidate IT investment and avoid the upgrading hardware expenses. It is pushing new decisions. Two Connectria Hosting customers that I spoke with last week fit both those descriptions. Here's what brought them to the popular IBM i MSP.

Morgan Craven, director of IT engineering at The Freeman Company, based in Dallas, Texas, described the situation that led him to Connectria as beginning with two AS/400 Model 810s running IBM i 6.1. The hardware was in need of replacement.

"From a capital standpoint, we didn't have an appetite internally to spend that much money because we would have to replace everything at once," Craven said. "We figured in hardware replacement, plus depreciation, maintenance, and third-party support--engineering expertise off-site through an IBM i Business Partner. So we started looking at alternatives."

Ultimately, The Freeman Company moved its production, development and test, and disaster recovery environments to two Connectria data centers.

"I can't say that the cloud is any less expensive," Craven said. "It was a wash for us. But it was better for Freeman in that situation. The cost comparison is based on 'hard' dollars. But from a 'soft dollars' standpoint, it has proved to be very valuable. Mainly this is because we have access to system management and automation tools that we never had access to before. We also have access to a different level of engineering that allows us to automate things we never had automated in the past."

A similar situation played out for Haroon Taqi, vice president of IT at St. Louis-based Centric. The migration to the Connectria hosted environment was determined to be a cost savings compared to the costs of buying new hardware and maintaining that system.

Centric was in the midst of an ERP migration when the decision was made to move its IBM iSeries environment into an MSP environment.

"We wanted to reduce our costs and reduce the amount of focus, attention, and day-to-day activities that were associated with the iSeries," Taqi said. "This was driven by costs and strategic focus on more value-added activities by turning over the hosting and maintenance to somebody else. The cost savings relate to the overall costs of hardware, licensing, maintenance, and the footprint, which was transferred to Connectria. I would say we have seen a significant overall cost reduction. Our service fee to Connectria costs much less than our costs to retain the hardware and the people to maintain it."

In addition to avoiding the costs of new hardware, Taqi noted that the move produced a human resource savings because the necessity of retaining in-house IBM i competency was erased.

"We don't have our staff involved with monitoring the system any longer.

If there is an issue we get notified by Connectria. We are out of the upgrade cycle and managing disaster recovery and all that. The existing staff is all doing other things, except in instances when they are alerted that a job hasn't run," he said.

Prior to the ERP migration, the iSeries (his words) was central to the business, but the new ERP has elevated the Oracle presence and decreased the importance of the iSeries. The iSeries, now hosted by Connectria, has "limited value" for Centric, Taqi said. The financial applications at a packaging plant owned by Centric will continue to run on the hosted iSeries.

At one time most of the computing at The Freeman Company was done on the AS/400, Craven noted. "Some functions have been moved to open systems, but some critical functions continue to run on IBM i. These will continue to run on the i for the foreseeable future."

Workloads on the IBM i remained status quo since the migration to the cloud. The custom applications are very specific and critical to Freeman's business. "There's nothing in The Freeman Company roadmap that would deprecate the i platform," Craven said. "We don't plan to add any workloads to it either. But as the

Printer Friendly Version

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Four Hundred
RSS

BACK ISSUES

business volumes grows the workload on 'the 400' will grow."

The Hosted i

At the Freeman Company the migration to the Connectria data center in St. Louis, Missouri, was accomplished over a two-week period. There was a full backup of the production environment sent to Connectria, where it was staged and user qualification and validation testing was completed. The same for procedure was also done with the development and test environment. The disaster recovery environment is run by Connectria in its Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, data center.

"They manage the systems based on what we ask them to do," Freeman's director of IT engineering said. "They perform a lot of the operational tasks. If we want to know about a job that aborts, for instance, they customize the alerts to go to our internal operations group. We used to have folks that understand the IBM i platform, but we don't anymore."

Taqi described the iSeries migration to the hosted environment as "fairly smooth."

"The only issue in the migration was the jobs were taking longer to run after the migration. But we worked through those kinks. Now it's rare when jobs don't complete normally."

Connectria has been performing a broad array of hosting services since 1998, which is a long time in this business and it means Connectria has some long-established hosted-provider customers.

In these two customer instances, Connectria provisioned a dedicated logical partition on its IBM Flex System with Power7-based modules via the Virtual I/O Server (VIOS).

IBM ramped up its support for managed service providers beginning several years ago, realizing MSPs as an opportunity to sell software and services. To provide technical support for MSPs, it put together global centers, which were designed to help develop services and solutions for specific industries on Power Systems platforms and provide training for MSPs.

RELATED STORIES

IBM i Shops Offloading Infrastructure

Steady Growth For The Connectria Cloud

Dispatches From The IBM i MSP Frontier

Sirius Considers Expanding Its Power Cloud Capacity

IBM i Cloud Watch

Editors: Timothy Prickett Morgan and Alex Woodie

Contributing Editors: Dan Burger, Joe Hertvik, Victor Rozek, Jenny Thomas, Hesh Wiener

Publisher and Advertising Director: Jenny Thomas

Contact the Editors: To contact anyone on the IT Jungle Team Go to our contacts page and send us a message.