

Fiserv heads off the IBM iSeries with ICBS

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the resultant code is very generic, with no accounting for what the software is trying to do. When Fiserv took some programs and redesigned and rewrote them from scratch, the outcome was much better.

Fiserv's global head, VP, solutions strategy group, David Hamilton-Matthews, says there was about a year and a half of thinking before the company commenced on its chosen route. 'There were a lot of people who wanted us to rush out and counter EquationPlus,' he says. This is a reference to Misy's high profile Java conversion plans for its own long-standing iSeries solution, Equation (IBS, October 2004). The Misy project, initially centred on the company's own conversion tool, has run ever later, with doubts now about whether there will actually be a successful outcome.

Working with IBM, Fiserv's attention turned to an alternative tack. Macaluso says: 'Frankly, the performance of C significantly outpaced the performance of Java'. Nevertheless, being a lower level language was a concern for some people, with little enthusiasm for working directly with C code. Irwine explains that 'one of our goals was to reuse the assets that we already

had'. Fiserv evaluated a tool from a company called PKS in Germany. This had done a fair amount of work moving applications from the iSeries to other environments and was keen to work with Fiserv on Linux. PKS's tool moves the RPG code into platform independent meta data and from here into C, with the tool tuned for certain operating systems and hardware platforms, as well as having the intelligence to understand the basics of the processes that it is being applied to. A team of five to six people from Fiserv spent one month in

Performance related work was probably about one-third of the project, says Macaluso. 'We've always been stable and scalable so there's been a lot of emphasis on performance aspects.' A separate tool from PKS has been applied to the ICBS user interface, producing browser support and additional features, with this now also set to become available for the existing RPG version. A 'fatter' client on Windows is also an option.

At present, Fiserv is effectively in a quality assurance phase, says Irwine. There

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Germany running the ICBS code through the tool. There was then an iterative process, revisiting the RPG to adapt it to optimise the eventual C code. For instance, it was possible to embed SQL into the RPG as well as 'hints' to be picked up by the tool and used in the transformation process. Portions of reworked code can be put back through the tool independently, rather than having to convert everything each time. The tool also has C++ APIs to manage data access.

is some database tuning and some other things to do at the hardware disk level; at present, there has been no need to write any C code directly. There is also work to integrate other Fiserv applications, including its strategically important Aperio layer (see below), Informant data warehouse, and teller system. A first phase of testing has shown the system supporting two million accounts; the ability to add servers means the expectation is that it will go considerably higher than this. Fiserv is using the existing system as the benchmark, says Macaluso. A demo version is available.

The target platform is SUSE Linux with IBM's UDB database for the pSeries. All development work will still be carried out in RPG, so Fiserv will have one core system code and this will be used to generate the C/UDB version. Fiserv has the PKS tool and is self-sufficient, albeit working with the German company where the tool needs to be enhanced, as well as for guidance. Fiserv could come up with a version for the IBM zSeries mainframe, although Irwine points out that there are still differences between IBM's different databases so work would be needed at this level. If there was demand for a C version for, say, a Hewlett-Packard and Oracle platform, then this would not be a big leap, says Macaluso, but there are no plans. Linux support via a partition on the iSeries means it could run on this platform, he adds.

In terms of market demand for the

Euroclear is making another attempt to improve STP rates in the investment fund sector, this time targetting fund distributors. There has been considerable progress with fund promoters, following the introduction of a two-tier pricing model for Euroclear's FundSettle service a couple of years ago, says Euroclear spokesman, Denis Peters. STP rates here are well above 90 per cent as a result, he says. However, many fund distributors still use fax and phone. The latest move is 'another driver to that push', he says. Euroclear is introducing an investment fund 'Premier' quality label for its FundSettle service. Fund transactions with this label will cost up to 25 per cent less to process, in an attempt to encourage distributors to automate their back offices. Euroclear is also seeking to emphasise other benefits: faster settlement; earlier notification and receipt of corporate action proceeds such as dividends; and reduced operating costs.

A number of fund promoters have agreed to carry the standard, including **Franklin Templeton Investments**, **Invesco**, **JPMorgan Asset Management**, **Pictet & Cie**, and **Schroder Fund Services Luxembourg**. FundSettle, launched in 2000, provides a single platform for processing subscriptions, redemptions, transfers and switches; it spans 33,000+ investment funds and 470+ transfer agents.

Saudi Arabian investment firms, **Jadwa Investments** and **AITawfeek Financial Group**, have taken **Thomson Financial's** Portia portfolio management system, to support their accounting and transaction processing, along with Saudi Arabia's Capital Markets Authority compliance, performance measurement, attribution and client reporting. The deals come just six months after the opening of Thomson Financial's Dubai office.

Linux version, Hamilton-Matthews says there was something of a leap of faith when the project began. Confidence that Linux was the right platform increased as the project progressed; at the same time, he notes, the route taken means Fiserv has not tied itself into one technology, as would have been the case with .Net or Java rewrites. Within the existing client base, there are two camps, he says. Many are strong advocates of the iSeries, even if some were apprehensive before adopting it. There are others, though, where the IBM platform is contrary to their corporate IT strategies. 'Every year they have to defend the iSeries, they get their exception and move on.' Some users run multiple copies of ICBS in partitions for multiple countries, and they might want to do so in the future using both Linux and the native iSeries version. A couple of potential takers are in the pipeline, he says, from both inside and outside the existing user base. In terms of CBS, Macaluso says: 'The US market hasn't asked us [for Linux]' but Fiserv now has the tool and processes to move this version across



David Hamilton-Matthews,
Fiserv

as well when someone wants it.

Aside from the C/Linux plans, Fiserv is pressing on with its product evolution plans centred on its Aperio solution (IBS, March 2006). This is the multi-channel sales and service platform built on top of the Portrait Foundation application platform suite from Portrait Software (AIT Group, as was). It constitutes a middle layer which provides

a single customer view across all systems and channels. More and more logic is being moved into Aperio, constituting a 'process-based' front-end so that the traditional back office system becomes a lighter transaction processing engine. Aperio can reside with both the RPG and C versions of ICBS, with these used for the batch processing but with Aperio increasingly for other processing.

One of the latest takers of Aperio is Papua New Guinea-based Bank of the South Pacific. It has taken this solution alongside Fiserv's CBS Data Warehouse, Nautilus Enterprise Content Management software, and CBS Teller platform. The bank, the largest retail player in the country, is aiming to expand into the Pacific Islands. It was already a user of ICBS and cites the breadth of the Fiserv front-end suite as a reason for the choice. There are seven Aperio projects under way, says Hamilton-Matthews. Countrywide is a relatively long-standing user; a couple of Mexican banks have recently gone live as well, he says.

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