

Can the AS/400 Survive IBM

by Brian W. Kelly

Original Appendix A

Typical Survey Responses:

I had a lot of informal and formal help in bringing this work to fruition. As I note in the book proper, a number of people gave me information and said that I could quote them while others gave me information and said that they were concerned about IBM's reaction to them for their comments and did not want to be quoted in the book.

One of the AS/400 consultants who responded to my survey is Barbara Chaderton, who practices in Northeastern PA (www.RPG911.com). She has been most helpful to me in my research. Not only did Barbara thoughtfully complete her survey, but she offered to post the survey to an AS/400 RPGIV Web Group at Yahoo that was headed by Bob Cozzi, a noted AS/400 technical expert. I was surprised at what happened next. Here is the exchange by date:

10/18/2003 From B. Chaderton to B. Kelly:

I'm a member at RPG IV Yahoo Group, headed by Robert Cozzi, Jr. Would you like me to solicit the members for their opinions?

10/19/2003 From B. Kelly to B. Chaderton:

Hi Barb,

If you think you can get a few responses, go ahead

10/22/2003 From B. Chaderton to B. Kelly:

Hi Brian,

I submitted your survey to the RPG IV community at Yahoo, headed and moderated by Bob Cozzi, who has declined to post it. Are we surprised?

Actually, I was surprised. I do not know Mr. Cozzi's motivations for not posting Ms. Chaderton's request, but I would have thought it could have made for some interesting interplay on the site. I am not a member of the group in question but I would not have expected what appears to be censorship from such a group or its group moderator.

Everybody has to live another day and that is the motivation that many who I solicited exhibited as I gathered raw thoughts and polished opinions for this work.

Over the course of my four years of work to produce this book, I asked many people many questions. Some I captured as quotes and some I wrote down as best as I could remember. I did not perform what would be called a formal poll but, as noted above, I did have a standard set of questions that I tried to get answers to over the years. You'd be surprised how many people do not want to be quoted if IBM has a possibility of taking it on the chin.

As a point of note, I do not want to be poking at IBM myself. One of my reasons for taking on this project is that I would like IBM to stop hurting its business opportunities and my business opportunities by mishandling its AS/400. I also feel that the company's mistakes over the last twenty years are egregious and hurtful unto themselves. I highlight many of those mistakes in this book to demonstrate IBM's extreme fallibility and the likelihood that it will mess up the AS/400 as the company has messed up many other outstanding opportunities over the years. I do wish Sam Palmisano, IBM, and all IBMers and retirees the best in the future. I am just doing my part to help the future be a little brighter for the AS/400 set.

The bulk of the survey questions and a sampling of the raw responses are included below:

1. Will the AS/400 survive IBM?

Responder 1:

Survive, yes. Flourish (as it deserves to), maybe. The AS/400 is so good, and has such a loyal customer base, that even IBM, despite their best efforts, can't screw it up totally.

Responder 2:

Personally, I believe the AS/400 will survive IBM. At this Fall's COMMON, I heard Frank Soltis speak, and the statistic he cited was the fact that AS/400 customers represent the largest customer base within IBM, and that the AS/400 customers are extremely important to the company. This tells me that IBM will do whatever it takes to keep the AS/400 marketplace alive and breathing.

Responder 4:

The AS/400 will survive since it is the best system out in the real world. IBM has to learn how to market the AS/400 better than it has on TV and the printed media.

Responder 5:

NO, IBM has forgotten or ignored the main purpose of business - "Satisfy the customer". They live in a world where the customer does not exist. They are so busy developing the multiple platform machine that they have forgotten the "bread and butter" customer.

Responder 6:

Yes, It has proven to be too costly for some companies to convert off of their legacy (AS/400) systems. I saw firsthand that some companies discovered that it was cheaper to stay with a system that already worked and could meet and exceed their future demands.

Responder 8:

Yes, IBM has built a lot of versatility into the AS/400 and has left room for enhancement on the box and have given hints of doing this in the future.

2. What must IBM do to help assure that the AS/400 will survive?

Responder 1:

Advertise to the business community, emphasizing the AS/400's strengths:

Reliability

Ease of administration

Reliability

Breadth of application packages available

Reliability

Low total cost of ownership

Reliability

I can't for the life of me imagine why IBM is allowing the AS/400 to lose business to PC networks. No well-informed businessperson would EVER opt for the fragility of a network over an AS/400 if he/she knew the whole story.

Responder 2:

It must do what it's currently doing: constantly update the hardware to remain competitive from a performance standpoint, continue to support hot technologies such as Linux, server consolidation, capacity upgrade on demand, and the like.

Responder 5:

Change their basic business concept - remember the small, medium and large customer.

Responder 6:

Market it to the general public. No one outside of an AS/400 shop ever heard of an iSeries or an AS/400.

Responder 8:

Any machine today must be able to cross platforms with its connectivity and the As/400 can do this now and IBM must continue to support and enhance this capability.

Responder 9:

Answer: IBM needs to scale down the pricing structure to be more marketable to small businesses

3. Can IBM be trusted to do the right thing for the AS/400 community?

Responder1:

They've done fairly well so far, if only by leaving those weirdoes in Rochester alone to do their own inscrutable thing. The Rochester folks, if they can in fact be considered IBM, have done a pretty good job for the AS/400. We may be OK if IBM corporate doesn't try to fix something that ain't broke.

Responder 2:

My biggest concern with IBM is the fact that they are not, in my opinion, attempting to grow new business. They seem to be "resting on their laurels" with the current customer base and are satisfied with that percent of market share. I wish they would advertise the platform more aggressively and promote what it is and what it has to offer.

Responder 3

IBM can be trusted to act in its own perceived best interest. But the AS400 isn't their only concern. Many times things get sub-optimized by other forces. Apple has to make its offerings work or they are out of business. IBM does not have to make it work in the marketplace to stay in business.

Responder 5:

With the proper direction-- yes. If they continue along the path they are presently on -- no.

Responder 7:

IBM never seems to be the first to do anything. We [AS/400 shops] are always playing catch up with the rest of the industry. IBM will not get it right.

Responder 8:

Yes, their track record speaks for itself. They are in business to make a profit but they also know the best way to do that is to support your customers.

Responder 9:

I'm one of those name brand people, when totally satisfied with a product. I don't shop around to save a few cents here and there when I'm happy with the product I use. Years ago I put total trust in 2 major entities: AT&T and IBM. Now I don't hesitate to look at other options. They no longer have the respect they once had. Considering that, I can't say that I trust IBM to do right by the AS/400 community. I've come to feel that it will only come if it suits their pocket; not ours!

4. Will the AS/400 become just another mainframe?

Responder 1:

I don't know that I'd mind so much if it did. My primary concern is that the AS/400 may become just another server. To lump the AS/400 in with all those Intel pieces of crap like IBM is doing currently, does a horrible disservice to the AS/400. It is a (if not the) premier "business" computer, not a "personal" computer, and should be positioned as such.

Responder 2

No. Because of the technologies I mentioned earlier, there will always be a component that will separate it from the rest of the pack.

Responder 3:

It already is a mainframe

5. Does the fact that there is no real ENTRY or cheap developer system hurt IBM's ability to grow the AS/400 and iSeries install base?

Responder 1:

I'm not sure that there would be an advantage to having Joe Bithead writing programs for the AS/400 in his basement. I don't think his product would serve the AS/400 community well. I think the people we want to have developing for the AS/400 can afford what's available now.

Responder 2:

Absolutely. It would be nice if you could get into AS/400-style technology at a lower price point. This would definitely help the platform.

Responder 9:

Answer: Yes indeed. A large percentage of IBM's potential customer base is comprised of small businesses, including developers. Naturally this group will seek alternative business solutions which are more affordable...

6. Should OS/400 be available on Intel for Windows XX type customers?

Responder 1:

Lord, no. OS/400 is a "business" operating system. It has no reason to be on a "personal" computer, on hardware designed to sell cheap, not run reliably. This would be a great way to have business people think as poorly of OS/400 as they currently do of Windows.

Responder 2:

No. Placing the LIC and other software on a different technology base would harm the platform.

Responder 7:

Absolutely

7 If a new \$3,000 AS/400 or iSeries server emerged, would it become the darling of the small business community and rescue Rochester's New Account Business?

Responder 1:

As long as IBM insists on keeping the AS/400's strengths a secret from the business community (I saw an IBM ad on TV the other day showing a black box and talking about how reliable it was and how easy it was to use. I thought I was finally seeing the AS/400 portrayed in the proper light. But, no, the ad was for the IBM PC line, (for cryin' out loud.), they could give the AS/400 away and still not achieve significant market penetration. Pricing isn't the problem and it's not the answer.

Responder 2:

Absolutely.

Responder 6:

That would be pretty cool, but I can't picture what it would contain at that price.

Responder 8:

Probably, but it would have to be versatile enough to satisfy the PC world proponents and also be powerful enough to satisfy the AS/400 group.

Responder 9:

If nothing else, it would provide an affordable stepping stone into the AS/400 environment for those that still haven't taken the plunge, including IT shops that are still on the SYS36 or SYS38 platforms, new start-up companies or small businesses that must limit expenditures and independent contractors struggling to survive.

8. What is needed to attract new and new/smaller customers to the AS/400?

Responder 1:

Same answer as #2 above.

Responder 2:

The answer to number 7 would certainly help, but I think there is also the issue I mentioned earlier with IBM not properly aggressively marketing the platform. I don't know how many times I have been asked the question, "What is the 400 exactly?"

Responder 6:

Marketing and lower prices. I read a story somewhere stating that Bill Gates got the jump on his competition early in his career by paying the maids at a convention hotel to replace the rooms' pillow cases with ones that contained the Windows logo. This was apparently done the night before a big computer convention of which Microsoft was a part. As the story goes, Bill had an advantage because people saw his logo beforehand and were sold on the advertising (and not the technology). I have no idea if the story is true....

Responder9

More affordable, entry-level hardware. Limit tier pricing to processor/capacity; drop user based tier pricing. Increase visibility in the business industry; rid the "legacy" perception. Market the AS/400 as the powerhouse behind the backbone; advertise! Provide the GUI interface to popular platforms/operating systems; become THE solution, not a vehicle for solutions

9. Does it matter that your non-technical neighbors have not heard about the AS/400 from anybody but you?

Responder 1:

Not at all. The AS/400 is a business machine. My neighbors have no more reason to be familiar with it than with a robotic arc welder or an automated fabric cutting system

Responder 2:

Yes, for the above-described reasons. If the AS/400 were a household name, and everyone knew what it was all about, there would be no other system out there.

Responder 6

Yes, it matters. As you wave the iSeries flag, you can see the judgment in their eyes as if they're thinking, "The poor guy is being left behind and doesn't even know it."

Responder 7:

Yes it certainly does. I am asked constantly why we are still using an AS/400 when the rest of the educational industry is using PC type servers.

Responder 8:

Yes, there has to be a market campaign launched to get the word around. However, the level of computer knowledge of the average person today is much higher than ever before.

Responder 9:

Yes it matters. The "buzz" on the streets drives user opinions. How does one convince management or the user community to invest in the AS/400 when it's looked upon as a dinosaur or a non-existent piece of hardware? If it's out of sight; it's out of mind. The AS/400 will continue to be a word of the past if IBM doesn't do something about it. It's either unheard of or considered the "Rich Man's Mainframe". I had to laugh the other day when someone that has heard of the AS/400 compared it to MS-DOS !!!! What an image, eh?

10. Many IT managers have complained that they have to keep selling the AS/400 against PC solutions in their shops because nobody in the organization understands whether it is good or bad that the company has an AS/400. Does this hurt AS/400 viability in these shops?

Responder 1:

Absolutely. PC's, and the businessman's ignorance about the part they should (or should not) play in his business, are the AS/400's biggest threat.

Responder 2:

Yes. For those idiotic IT managers and their superiors that feel an open solution is better than the AS/400, I pity them. When I am asked if I would have done anything differently here in terms of selecting the [AS/400] technology, I say "No." Why would anyone want to run the critical aspects of their business on something that locks up when it attempts to print?

Responder 5:

Yes

Responder 6:

Yes. If the long-term strategy of the company does not include the AS/400, then less money will be put towards development.

Responder 7:

Yes it does. More pre-packaged software is available on the PC platform.

Responder 8:

Yes, I think so.

11. Would it be better if the management team heard from somebody other than the IT Manager regarding the worthiness of AS/400 technology?

Responder 1:

Absolutely. See Responder 1 answer to #2 above.

Responder 2:

The more the better.

Responder 5:

Yes, trade publications would be a great benefit to the AS/400. Our software vendor is only available on the AS/400. This should be advertised and stressed in a trade publication for insurance software, etc.

Responder 6:

Yes

Responder 7:

Yes

Responder 8:

Absolutely, human nature seems to dictate that if someone from outside your organization says the same thing as you it is more true.

Responder 9:

Of course it would! Management talks among others in the business. If the AS/400 isn't a common choice amongst their peers, they're more likely to go with what is working for others, no matter what their IT Managers suggest.

12. Would television advertisements that highlighted the platform as a business machine help?

Responder 1:

I think advertising in any medium, targeted to the business community, would not only help, it could make the AS/400 the howling success it so richly deserves to be.

Responder 2:

Absolutely.

Responder 6:

Yes. Getting the name out to the public as another business solution is a proven strategy.

Responder 8:

Yes

13. Would the words "industrial strength" help get home the message?

Responder 1:

Anything that would stress reliability would help a great deal.

14. What should IBM's messages be regarding the AS/400?

Responder 1:

I think [there are] plenty of customers who would be willing to testify to the reliability and low total cost of ownership of the AS/400. I think {IBM} should be advertising the heck out of these success stories.

Responder 2:

If I were running this advertising campaign, my focus would be on some of the things I've already seen come out of IBM, just not those that are in the mainstream. For example, showing a room full of Intel-based servers that perform specific functions and then showing a single AS/400 that does all of those functions in one integrated box.

Responder 8:

Exploit the connectivity area. You can do it the same as before only easier and better without having to reinvent the wheel.

15. In the 25 years that IBM had to put a standard GUI console / user interface on the AS/400, Why has IBM not delivered?

Responder 1

Perhaps it has been too difficult for IBM to design a native GUI interface that would co-reside with all the native green screen applications still in existence. I think also it has been difficult until recently (last 5 years, say) to convince the appropriate people within IBM to give a GUI interface on the AS/400 the appropriate priority to get it done.

Responder 2:

It's not for a lack of trying. It's just -- it's not well done. Personally, I think they give up too easily. Building a GUI system builds upon multiple releases. Microsoft has been at it for several years now, and they are only close to getting it right. IBM tries one thing and gives up too quickly. If they would just focus on a specific direction and continue to modify, refine, and upgrade that direction, I think things would be a lot more in focus.

. If IBM had the GUI intent from the very beginning and the passion and focus to get it done properly, a server-based GUI solution would have definitely evolved.

Responder 6

Yes, GUI sounds like a great notion, but I'm not qualified to give you any supporting reasons as to why IBM has none yet.

16. Would a GUI oriented AS/400 or iSeries, be such a big change that even the press and other divisions in IBM notice that the box is no longer "legacy."

Responder 1:

Won't happen automatically. It depends completely on how IBM chooses to handle it.

Responder 2:

I think the reaction would be mixed.

Responder 7:

You use the term legacy. What is legacy? If we re-write an application in RPG, is it still considered legacy because of the green screen? If we WebFace our applications, are they still considered legacy? I know of schools that do not have as much to offer as we do when it comes to applications but they are not considered legacy. Is legacy anything older than 1 day? Who is defining legacy?

Responder 8:

Yes

17. Did the renaming to eServer iSeries 400 help or hurt the prospects for sales for this server.

Responder 1:

Not much either way. Most people still call it the AS/400.

Responder 2:

It's indifferent. Nobody knew what the 400 was, and nobody knows what iSeries is, except those who are already involved.

Responder 5:

It only added to the confusion of what the AS/400 really is.

Responder 6:

Not sure.

Responder 7:

People still refer to it as the AS400. That will not change.

18. What is the one most special thing about an AS/400 or iSeries that you think is most significant or that you just like the best?

Responder 1:

Reliability.

Responder 2:

It's stability. Knocking on wood.

Responder 5:

One word - dependability

Responder 6:

Logical Partitioning

Responder 7:

I like the fact that we can develop applications very quickly ...

Responder 8:

Connectivity

Responder 9

Starting within the Model 8/SYS34 era, I'm easily impressed by the processing speed alone; especially after migrating to RISC ! Wow!

19 What is the biggest shortcoming about an AS/400 or iSeries that you think is most significant or that you dislike the most?

Responder 1:

IBM's decision to keep it a secret from the business community.

Responder 2:

It's price.

Responder 5:

The AS/400 has no shortcomings - only the people who should be there to assist and support could be considered a shortcoming.

Responder 8:

There always seems to be an add-on to everything. Some things should be standard with the box and not an extra.

Responder 9

**(Probably best NOT to quote me on this, but it's my honest opinion!)
Coming from someone who has always specialized in RPG, I feel squeezed out of an industry that I've dedicated myself to, simply because I lack other language skills favored for integration with Client Server applications.**

Editor's Note: IBM has done nothing to leverage the RPG and COBOL skills of the AS/400 technician by migrating AS/400 techniques to other platforms. Instead, IBM pushes its AS/400 loyal following to be like everybody else and join the Windows / Java crowd. For those who have given twenty-five years to IBM and RPG, that is not looked upon as a fair requirement.

20. Should IBM sell off the AS/400 product line?

Responder 1:

NO. NO. NO. IBM should lead with the AS/400 and regain some of its old glory.

Responder 2:

Absolutely not.

Responder 5:

To Who? Bill Gates????

Responder 8

No

21. Should IBM run Windows 2003 on its Power PC platform? (iSeries) partition?

Responder 1:

What a horrible idea!!!! Windows is the biggest pile of crap ever foisted on the American public. It simply doesn't work. Only MicroSoft's incredible marketing legerdemain has made this product what it is today. It has nothing to do with the inherent value of the product itself.

Responder 5:

Not sure, it is a point to ponder, if it could be supported (maybe).

Responder 8:

Yes

22. Should the AS/400 be an all everything platform that is relevant at the very small end (< \$3,000 servers) and at the mainframe size end, providing all operating systems, from OS/400 to Windows to OS/390?

Responder 1:

There's no reason why the AS/400 could not be all things to all people, but it should never, never run Windows (see answers above).

Responder 2:

Yes. It is important to keep up with the latest technologies in Linux and PCs.

Responder 8:

It needs to be flexible but I do not think it has to be all serving. I do not think it has to be on the high OS/390 end.

Responder 9

IBM should not try to make the AS/400 everything to everyone. They should just concentrate on maintaining the powerhouse environment and providing affordable solutions to companies, while providing the GUI interface [as] for all it's competitors. That would convey to the general public that there's room for all of us in the business world, which in the end, I believe, would both increase their customer base and create a more harmonious atmosphere for developers of multiple platforms.

23. Does IBM's apparent emphasis on topics such as Linux, Logical Partitioning, etc. help or hurt long term AS/400 prospects?

Responder 1:

IBM would obviously like to see Linux hurt (or even supplant) Windows in the PC marketplace. I would love to see that happen, but I don't think IBM can get that done. LPAR is one of the best things to happen to the AS/400 in its history. IBM needs to continue to enhance it. It is encouraging to see that IBM continues to add new features and functions to the AS/400. It represents the one small ray of hope as IBM continues to treat the AS/400 as a [different looking] stepchild.

Responder 2:

It helps tremendously and makes me feel proud to be part of the group.

Responder 5

Hurt - we are a small company that has no interest in this type of technology. I personally stopped going to announcements and Web seminars because that was all that was stressed. It almost seemed like if you were not big enough, they had no interest in your problems or concerns.

Responder 8:

I think it helps. The more cross platform capability the better. People are looking for something that will do the job easily and compactly. They do not want to have several different machine types for several different aspects of their business.

Responder 9:

My dealings with LPAR are very limited. However, several networking associates have compared it to having too many eggs in one basket.

24. Other Comments:

Responder 5:

I have been a loyal advocate of IBM for years. However, some of their pricing and business priorities have left me wondering if IBM still cares and "is loyal" to me.

Well, there you have it. This group was representative of the totality of people that I interviewed or discussed these topics with during my four years of research for this book. Overall, the AS/400 community would like IBM to do some things for them that they don't see getting done. Whether IBM responds properly to all of these concerns, voiced in this book survey and throughout the AS/400 industry segment, will be the deciding factor as to whether the AS/400 as a product survives IBM.

Thank you to all who helped me in this survey. I wish you as well as all other readers an absolutely wonderful future – with or without AS/400 technology.

Best wishes to all!