



THE OMNI USER

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April Showers Bring Rainbows

Ah, I love writing newsletters! Especially when we continue to have so much great news. With IBM's announcements, and more coming down the road, it's clear that our beloved iSeries (or whatever you choose to call it this week) is alive and well. Of course, that leads to a different question: wat about RPG? And it just so happens that our "notes from the field" will address that particular question!

What else? Well, it's time for us to start thinking about the fall OMNI conference. We're in the midst of planning, and we're going to need your input. For starters, how much of a conference do you want? One day, two days? Friday, Saturday, Friday and Saturday? I'll have more specific questions later in the document.

Also, I want to hear from you what you want to see in this newsletter and on our website. There is just so much information out there, we'd like to be your portal into all that great stuff. How about a monthly listing of new iSeries Redbooks? Or maybe a reader-submitted iSeries Site of the Month? Pointers to other iSeries sites?

Or maybe you want information on auxiliary technologies? Interested in Tivoli? Want to get started with PHP? Where do you need education? Because that's our mission: to be your eyes and ears, and to bring you the very best information we can find.

As to the title of this month's newsletter, did anybody get a chance to go outside on March 30th? It must have been about 5:00PM and the storms had just passed through the Northwest suburbs. My wife told me to go outside and when I did, I saw the most spectacular double rainbow I've ever seen. Even if you get a chance to see a second rainbow, it is normally quite dim, but in this case it was nearly as bright as the primary rainbow. Just thought I'd share ... now on to the newsletter! -- Joe

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Edited by Joe Pluta - omni-comm@plutabrothers.com

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Well, okay, forget about the exciting part. But if you have some time and want to do something for your local user group, we could use your help. One of our initiatives this year is to make sure we get our database completely up to date, and to strengthen the communications channel with all our subscribers. To do that, we're going to need to send out some snail mail, maybe make some calls, that sort of thing. If you're interested in helping in that sort of activity, please contact our membership director, Sal Stangarone. You can email him at sals@mrc-productivity.com; we're sure he'd love to hear from you.

April Dinner Meeting

Tuesday, April 19, 2005

**Embassy Suites Hotel
707 E. Butterfield Rd
Lombard, IL**

5:00 Registration and User Discussions

6:00 Dinner and Break

6:45 Business Meeting & Presentation

The Top Ten iSeries Security Exposures

Too many of the 'accepted practices' on the AS/400 expose our data to unnecessary risk. This highly popular session lists the top ten system configuration and work management risks that AS/400s are exposed to and explains how to reign in the exposures. The session outlines specific "Bad" security practices, and describes how these practices can be exploited by people inside and outside your organization.

While this session focuses on the high level view of security risks on iSeries, it does delve into specific technical problems where appropriate. Companies facing HIPAA, Sarbanes-Oxley, and other legislated security mandates will find this presentation especially timely.

John Earl, The PowerTech Group

John Earl is Vice President and Chief Technology Officer for The PowerTech Group, a Seattle area iSeries security software company. He has published numerous security related articles and columns for industry magazines, served as a Subject Matter Expert (SME) for Security for COMMON U.S., has presented hundreds of iSeries security sessions at industry conferences and user groups all over the world. He is a three time winner of COMMON's Speaker Excellence award, and also serves on the board of directors of COMMON U.S.

With S/38, AS/400, and iSeries experience dating back to 1980, John shares a unique depth and insight on OS/400 topics, and is especially well versed in the areas of Security and System Management.

Dinner Menu Options

Starter: Tossed Salad

Meat: Chicken Hunter, With Mushrooms & Red Wine Sauce and Roasted Red Skin Potatoes

Veggie: Pasta Primavera, Mixer of vegetables sautéed in a wine sauce and served atop a large portion of pasta.

Dessert: New York Cheesecake

April Dinner Meeting Registration

Please make your reservations by Thursday, April 14, 2005 at Noon. Call (630) 953-6312, and leave your company name, names of those attending, and the type of meal desired (meat or vegetarian.)

Cancellation Policy

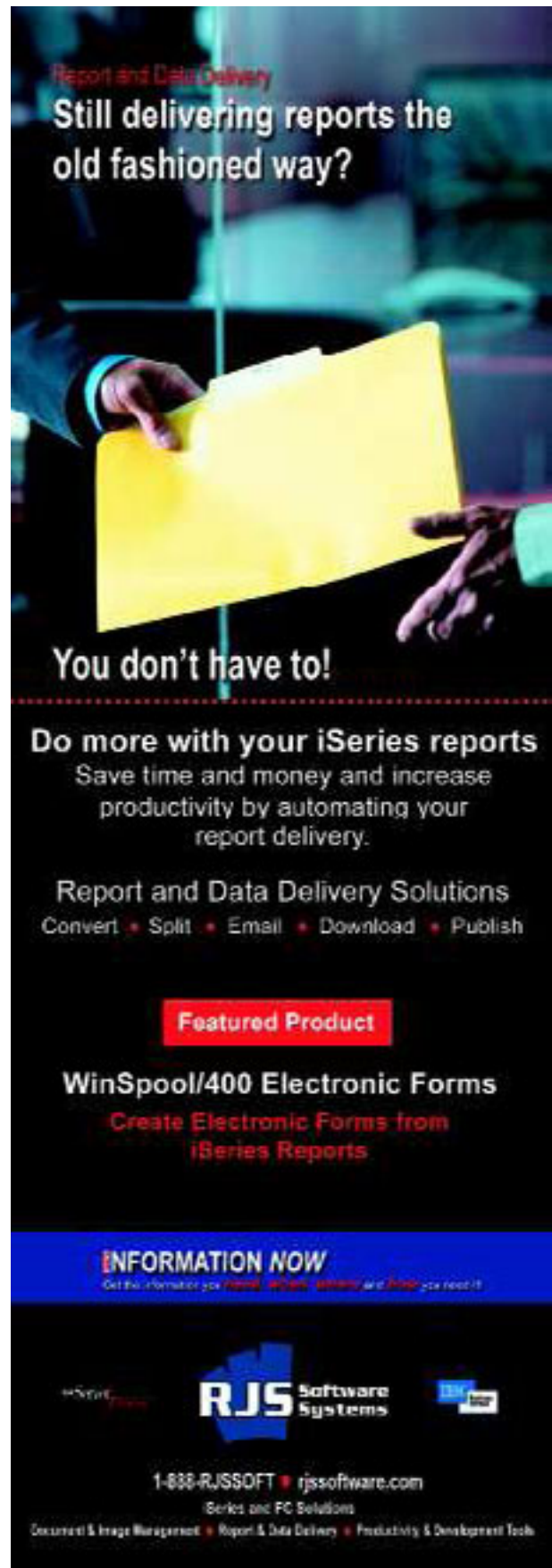
Full refund will be issued for cancellations made before 9:00 am Friday, April 15th.

After 9:00 am Friday, 04/15/04, cancellation refund depends on meeting attendance.

All cancellations must be made as described below.

Dinner Meeting Cancellation

It is VERY important to cancel your reservation(s) if you cannot attend, by calling (630) 953-6312 and leaving the name(s) of those unable to attend, or by using the web cancellation feature.



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Coming Midrange Events

April 19 All Day Event	FREE WebSphere Development Studio Client for iSeries Overview Course Online registration available here! (Technology Center, 3rd Floor Learning Room I)	IBM Chicago One IBM Plaza 330 N. Wabash Avenue Chicago, IL 60611 312-245-4200
April 19 5:00 pm	OMNI Monthly Dinner Meeting The Top 10 iSeries Security Exposures John Earl - The Power Tech Group Online registration available here!	Embassy Suites 707 E. Butterfield Rd Lombard, IL
April 26 6:30 pm	OMNI Board of Directors Meeting <i>all are welcome</i>	Hosted by IBM Two Lincoln Centre Oakbrook Terrace, IL

Thanks to Everyone Who Stopped by the OMNI Booth at COMMON!

WebSphere Development Studio Client for iSeries **Free One-Day Class**

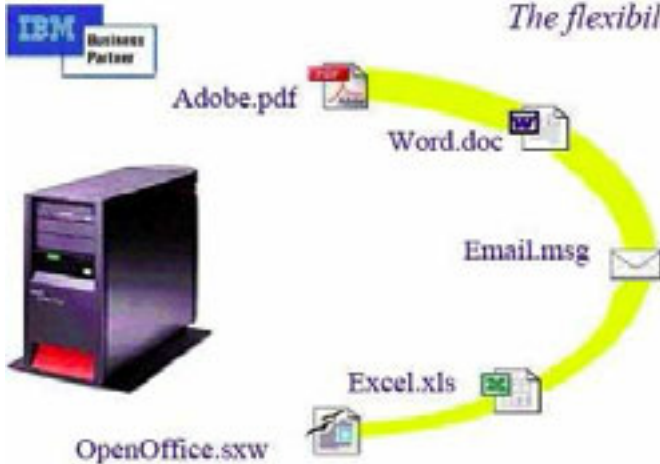
One of the first steps in modernizing an AS/400 application is to update/modernize the tooling. Customers currently using older-generation, 5250-based PDM, SEU, SDA and assorted tools and compilers will need to acquaint themselves with WebSphere Development Studio Client for iSeries (WDSC) V5.1.2. The rewards are large, because WDSC enables developers to be highly responsive to new e-business initiatives while preserving the value of their legacy code investments and skills. RPG Developers can find out more about how Remote System Explorer can increase productivity. This session is useful to customers assessing whether they require WebSphere Development Studio and if they do, whether the standard client or Advanced client is needed.

Due to the limited space for these classes, customer confirmations will be sent via e-mail.

<http://www.ibm.com/servers/events/regionalsales/iclass.html>

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March Dinner Meeting

This month's speaker(s) didn't need to travel far if they were attending the 2005 Chicago Common conference, and what Common would be complete without John Reed and Al Barsa? John, the Director of iSeries Product Development and Business Operations, kicked off the evening's festivities. He discussed the state of the iSeries and how it has a strategic place not only in IBM's product line up, but also in the entire landscape of our vast computer industry.

Al Barsa's musically themed session called "It's About Time" focused on the implications of time zone changes on the computer industry and what companies need to do to pre-handle potential miscalculations. We thank John Reed and Al Barsa for taking their "TIME" to spend enlightening us, The Common User.

Ask the Audience

Who wants to be a millionaire? Well, actually, I wouldn't mind. But that's not the point. The point is that nobody has all the answers, not even your beloved OMNI staff. And because of that, we've decided to use a lifeline, and ask you some questions. To start with, we'll ask them right here in the newsletter and you can respond via email to me (send your responses to omni-comm@plutabrothers.com). And soon we hope to have questions like these on the website as well!

Here are two different questions:

First, if you had your choice, what would be the ideal time of week and length for our Fall conference? Assume that the longer it is, the more excellent tracks we have. Would you like:

One day, midweek	One day, Friday	One day, Saturday
Two days, Thursday/Friday	Two days, Friday/Saturday	Two day, Saturday/Sunday

Second, please let us know which of the following you would like to see in the newsletter and/or on the website. Putting them in order of preference would be nice (and just because I list it doesn't mean it will get done immediately!):

- A list of IBM Redbooks published this month on the iSeries
- A list of IBM sales/marketing programs and contact numbers
- A list of other user groups
- A list of great web sites (including perhaps Site of the Month)

What else can you think of?

Deep Blue Thoughts

Remember when all the experts told us we would be flippin' burgers if we stayed with RPG and the IBM midrange? Well, they were right!

I was so successful as a consultant/IBM Midrange Developer that I have had the luxury of taking more time off, staying at the lake, drinking beer, barbequing burgers and the ever so thick succulent steak that I have become a master at burger flippin'.

And with all the time off available from the server never crashing, the lack of staff to manage, things not going wrong, I have time to learn new "flippin'" techniques: over the shoulder, behind the back, no hands, etc.

I love my job!
-Anonymous

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April 2005 COMMON Corner

Reprinted from the April 2005 issue of COMMON.CONNECT

Strength in Numbers

User Group Consortium Multiplies Power, Resources of Individual Groups

If your user group is too small to attract the big-name speakers you want, or lacks the volunteers to produce a major seminar or educational event, consider working with other regional groups.

Super Eight

North East User Groups Conference [NEUGC] is a consortium made up of eight local user groups:

- FASUG, the Fairfield AS/400 Users Group (Connecticut)
- HUMS, the Hartford Users of Midrange Systems (Connecticut)
- LISUG, the Long Island System Users Group
- MEMUG, the Maine Midrange Users Group
- NEMUG, the New England Midrange Users Group (Rhode Island)
- NES, New England Systems, Inc. (Massachusetts)
- NHMUG, the New Hampshire Midrange Users Group
- VTMUG, the Vermont Midrange Users Group

These groups work together to put on an annual educational conference that is bigger and better than any event that they could host separately. The combined talents and efforts of their volunteers, and the impressive size of the consortium itself and the audience they can attract, mean that NEUGC can recruit top speakers, excellent exhibitors and other factors that make their conference a major event in their part of the world.

How the Work Gets Done

Conference planning begins with a review of possible educational content. Several volunteers review statistics from the previous conference as well as COMMON's conference and other industry educational events to determine what topics are popular. "We'll put together a preliminary set of topics and start to consider speakers to go with them," says **Glenn Ericson** of LISUG. "We know we always have to include a certain amount on RPG and programming, and any current and future developments. We'll look for IBM announcements."

A small group of volunteers from each of the local user groups do the work of planning and preparing for the conference. This group holds approximately 10 face-to-face meetings throughout the year. Each member of the planning group has a specific task, such as arranging audiovisual for the conference, working with the hotel or handling speaker logistics. "A lot of these volunteers stay year after year," says Ericson. "But of course people leave and are replaced. I'd say that 10 or 15% are newcomers each year."

This low turnover helps keep the planning process smooth, especially since the upcoming conference will be the 15th that the consortium has held. “By now, the planning process is near habit for us,” says Ericson. “We have a pre-built protocol, and everyone knows what everyone else is doing.”

There is a hierarchy to the conference committee, including a Conference Manager who can act as decision-maker when necessary. But typically, two or three people can make many of the decisions. “We accomplish more in two or three hours than COMMON can in as many days,” says Ericson, “simply because of the number of people involved.”

How the Conference Works

The 15th Annual Northeast iSeries/AS/400 User Group Conference takes place this month –April 11-13 to be exact. “We have up to 160 sessions at a conference,” says Ericson. “The first day we’ll have more in-depth sessions—four-hour lecture seminars and six-hour lectures that include labs. The other days are concurrent sessions like COMMON.”

The conference also includes a packed Expo. “We should stop at 30 vendors,” says Ericson, “but we’ve been known to run over that limit a bit.”

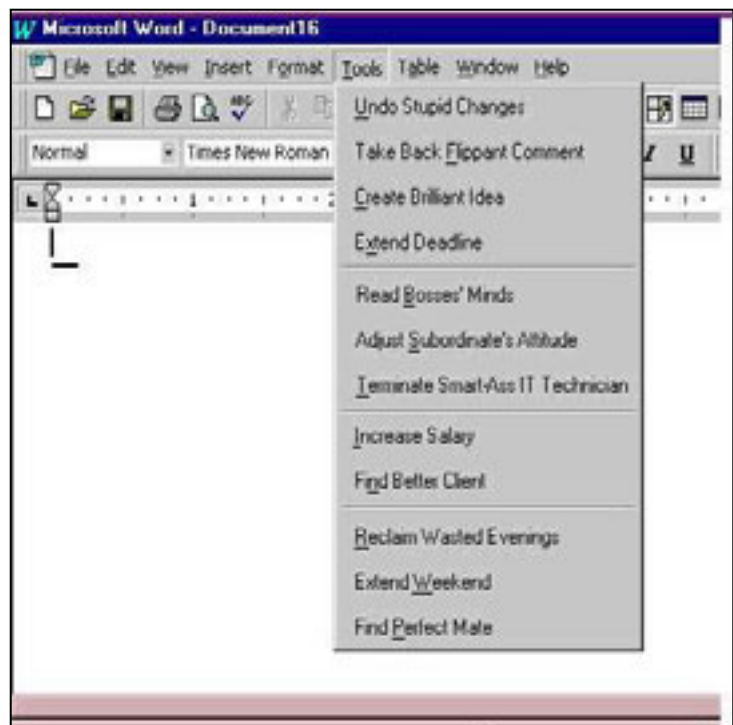
While some speakers will present sessions for no charge, the consortium will pay travel expenses if necessary, and even pays for some speakers who require a fee. Despite these and other costs, the conference is a moneymaker, and the user groups split the profits. Some of that money is used as “seed money” for the next year’s conference.

How Other LUGs Can Form a Consortium

If your local user group is in a densely populated region with other LUGs nearby, you might consider approaching those groups about banding together for mutual advantage. Perhaps you could co-sponsor a large event like the Northeast User Groups Conference, or simply coordinate your monthly meetings so that you can attract big-name speakers. In the 1980s, LISUG, FASUG and a New Jersey users group did this. They rearranged their monthly meetings so that all fell within the same week, on back to back evenings, and then got IBM speakers to travel to the New York TriState area to speak at all three meetings. “When you have enough people power, it’s a no-brainer decision for IBM to send someone out,” says Ericson.

What are some roadblocks to forming a powerful user group consortium? “The biggest challenge is the logistics of where the groups are located,” says Ericson. “Distance can be a problem if you lose a whole business day to travel to a meeting. If you’re going to be a member of a group like this, you have to be prepared to donate the time.”

If you’re interested in learning more about how to form a similar consortium, contact Ericson at Glenn-Ericson@att.net for more information on NEUGC, visit www.neibmconf.com.



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Notes from the Field

- **RPG: Getting the Word Out** (by Joe Pluta)

Okay, the last issue talked quite a bit about the new announcements from IBM, and how we're going to be hearing a lot more from IBM about the iSeries box. They're going to promote the iSeries, they're going to market the iSeries, they're going to make "shelf space" for the iSeries. But one thing was almost completely missing from all of these conversations. One term was almost never heard (in fact, it was only really on one slide), and that term was "RPG".

Now, I've just gotten done writing a column for MCMagOnline in which I go into some detail about the fact that RPG is still alive and kicking. IBM has been putting a nice chunk of cash into RPG every year, and it shows. The changes in the last decade or so, from the addition of ILE (with procedures, modules and service programs) to the introduction of /free syntax have been enormous. I don't think another major language in the world today has undergone such change, except *maybe* Java, and that's only because ten years ago Java didn't really exist.

Even so I still hear an ongoing muttering (admittedly it's usually from non-iSeries folks) that RPG is a "joke" language. That "real IT professionals" don't take RPG seriously. So that's the question I want to pose to you all today.

Let me relate a little of my background. I started out in high school as a night operator pulling paper off the back of a 1502 line printer hooked up to a System/3 model 15D (with CCP!). Basically, that part of the company was a service bureau: we input your data and ran your reports and sent them to you. We had one online customer who came through CCP and did online maintenance and inquiries.

Night operations was pretty straightforward: run the reports, print them from the spooler, burst them and box them. If you don't know what a burster is, consider yourself lucky; basically, it mechanically pulls apart multipart forms. The other part of the job was modifying programs. We would get greenbar program listings on which the high muckety-mucks had scribbled changes, and we had to make those changes. This involved a 3741 diskette punch machine, \$MAINT and a lot of pain and suffering, but that was the price you paid for a high-paying job in the field of computer science.

But one day I saw a book lying around. It was the IBM "programmed learning guide" for RPG. This unique book changed my life. What it did was it started out with the basics, and asked questions. You flipped the page to get the answer, and also to get to the next question. If nothing else, night operators have lots of time, and I ate that book up. Everything in it appealed to me, and the language made a very elegant kind of sense. In

essence, the idea was to read a record from the primary file and do something with it. In most cases, it was printing, but that often involved totaling. You could add secondary files to get more information, and the things you could do with printing were nothing short of miraculous. (Little did I know that those miraculous printed reports would eventually lead me to being balled up in a corner, sobbing and screaming "Curse you, fetch overflow!"; but that would be later and I received professional help for it.) There was a concept called a level break, which allowed you to perform special calculations when key values changed. And then there were indicators: 99 different Boolean flags that we could use to condition different actions. Simply fabulous!

Anyway, I'm a little off track here, but that's because I think that the RPG I'm describing is the RPG most people think of. I don't know that the average IT professional understands the power of the language, nor the progression it has gone through in the last 25 years or so. Heck, even back then we were using the language for online transaction processing programs. Web application programmers today have this "new" concept of a session ID, which is then used to load temporary data. We had the same thing way back then: the workstation ID was sent to the NEP-MRT program, which then used that ID to set all the internal variables and indicators. Voila! Instant stateful sessions. Back in the 1970s.

The language has grown over the years, adding features that would have boggled my mind 20 years ago. And yet, because RPG is so inextricably linked with the iSeries, I think that outside of our immediate IBM midrange circle anybody who even knows the language thinks of it as indicators and input primary files. We need to get the word out. To that end, here are some questions:

The language:

Have you tried other languages, and if so, how does RPG compare? What features in RPG do you use the most? Which features have you found lacking in other languages? Which features have you found lacking in RPG? What was the best feature (or several features) added in the last ten years?

The future:

Do many universities and technical vocation centers teach RPG around where you live? Does the number worry you? What percentage of RPG programmers do you know who learned RPG in school?

The message:

Is RPG still a viable language today? Would you tell a new programmer to learn RPG? If so, how would you convince him?

Contact me with questions or comments: omni-comm@plutabrothers.com