

Baker College Earns Top Marks in IBM i Application Modernization

Case Study Highlights

- **Company:** Baker College
- **Industry:** Education
- **Business Challenge:** Outdated green screen applications reduced the perceived value of the college's IBM i platform
- **Solutions:** Profound UI and Mass Conversion services to automate transition to modern, web-based RPG applications

About Baker College

Running on the IBM i (AS/400, iSeries) platform, Baker College's IT department over time has compiled well over a million lines of legacy RPG code which supports over 1300 menu items. In an effort to fully modernize their business applications away from the 5250 data stream as part of a large-scale portal initiative, Baker turned to Profound Logic

The Challenge

Since its beginnings at the turn-of-the-century, Baker prepares Michigan students for careers in high-demand fields, including business, health sciences, engineering and information services. The college strives to offer its students the most up-to-date technologies for their learning experience, including over 7,000 on-site computers and access to e-learning programs. Baker College's IT department is a large part of this effort.

The department, led by director Mike Andritsis, supports IT needs throughout the college, and develops business applications that run on an IBM i backend to support the college's administration. Over time, the department has compiled well over a million lines of legacy RPG code which supports over 1300 menu items. Recently, the team began work on an online portal to consolidate and modernize those programs and improve ease-of-use and end-user efficiency. "The feedback we received from end-users at the college is that the applications they accessed on 5250 looked old. We would get asked frequently why we were using programs that looked like DOS from several decades ago." As the project advanced, some at the college wondered if staying on the IBM i platform at all was a smart longterm strategy. "Unfortunately, there are many people who view the IBM i as outdated," states Andritsis. "I believe IBM i is an incredibly reliable, stable platform, and that it makes sense to use modernization tools that are available for the i instead of essentially throwing the baby out with the bathwater."

Now Andritsis had his mission: Prove that the college could save significant time and money by using their existing hardware, application code and RPG developers to create a modern, browser-based portal for end-users. To tackle this challenge, Baker turned to Profound Logic.

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Mike Andritsis
IT, Baker College

The Solution

Soon into their project, Andritsis realized they needed more than just modernization tools. In order to fully convert their existing 5250 applications to the Web and roll out the new portal system to their end-users, they would need to work with a software partner who could support them at all stages of the project. "We knew of Profound Logic's reputation as an RPG application modernization platform provider, but we wanted to meet them face-to-face to see if they could work with a project of this scale. We have nearly 2,000 end-users who would be impacted by this change, and we needed to make sure it was done right. We weren't disappointed."

Andritsis and his team selected Profound UI as the tool of choice for modernizing their applications. Profound UI leverages IBM's RPG Open Access feature that enables developers to convert DDS source code into Rich Display Files, and design interfaces with the type of dynamic Web capabilities today's workforce expects. "Once we started using Profound UI, we didn't look back," says Andritsis. "We could immediately tell that it would give us the ability to create the type of powerful, modern, Web based applications our employees were looking for. And from the IT side, we liked the fact that it wouldn't restructure our code to get the desired results."

Additionally, Andritsis and his team looked to Profound Logic for services to assist with the planning, conversion and rollout of the new applications. As part of the release schedule, Baker College wanted to roll out a 'beta' version of a converted application in parallel with the existing green-screen application for testing purposes, and Profound was happy to help. "The amount of energy Profound gave us was incredibly impressive. They enabled us to totally reinvent our business portal at an incredibly attractive price point. And because they worked with us on mass conversions and parallel systems, it wasn't twice the work for our team."

At the end of the day, Andritsis and team are satisfied that they were able to meet their deadlines and roll out a product that is well-received by end-users, without needing to leave their existing platform and source code behind. "We're always learning as we go to see what interface elements work best, and what new functionality makes sense. And we're always looking for ways to make end users more effective and efficient. Thanks to Profound Logic, we now have a platform to take our applications anywhere, without the restrictions of 5250."

The Results

Since starting the application portal and modernization project in 2010, Baker College is now through the roll-out and testing phase, and has trained the school's end-users on working with their new, modernized applications. "Even though our end-users expressed frustration at working with 5250 screens, I expected some push-back on working with the modernized applications," says Andritsis. "But I was blown away at the positive reception the users gave them. The Profound UI solution gave our applications the rich Web interface and user experience they expected." To further support end users, the IT team created a cross-reference tool to help users locate items from the greenscreen within the new system.

But the project doesn't end there. Andritsis and his team have plans for even more enhancements and improvements. "Phase One of our modernization project with Profound UI gave us a fresh start with exciting features you can't find in 5250, like clickable items," Andritsis said. "Now we're planning for our applications to have even more dynamic functionality to reduce the number of clicks on the part of users, and we will work with Profound on batch processing to further speed up the project."