

Unique tools for migration from closed mainframe to open platform

Romke Wijmenga



More and more mainframe users want to switch to open environments. Asysco in Coevorden has the solution for them. In a fully automated process, mainframe based applications and databases are converted to a Windows platform, for example.

Asysco is currently heading for great success with its solution for Unisys mainframes.

The company is active worldwide in this field, and even has its own subsidiary in North America. They are also working hard at a solution for IBM mainframes. Once that's ready, then things are really expected to get moving. "We're unique in this", says Romke Wijmenga, Chief Technology Officer at Asysco. "And so we don't really have any competitors. Asysco is the only company to have the conversion of Cobol and Linc (the Unisys specific 4GL) to the open platforms take place fully automatically. With the guarantee that it actually works; a not unimportant detail."

Need

Asysco was founded in 1979 and began with services and customized software on Unisys mainframes. In the mid-1990s, own software was added, along with an R&D department. By now, this has developed into a strategy aimed at migration of mainframes to the open Windows, Unix and Linux platforms. Not only the application itself migrates to the open environment, the database is also converted into an open relational database. "We went down this road because we noticed a need for it among the mainframe users", explains Wijmenga. "There are so many applications working on mainframes and so many man hours of work involved. Anyone wanting to switch to an open platform can choose between starting from scratch and developing new applications and new databases, or taking them along. That's why we've developed migration tools."

He continues: "We began this in 1998 and it was immediately clear that it was exactly what the market required. Our solutions have been useful for a large number of clients, for example Brabantia, the Lage Landen, Agrico and the Broekman Group in the Netherlands. However, we also have many foreign customers, such as the Spanish government, the Bank of Finland, HBOS in the UK and many others all over the world. We began work in the US in 2001 and business was immediately booming there. We've since opened a full subsidiary there, because it's not possible to work from the Netherlands. Half of our turnover is currently generated there."

Also IBM

The end of the success story is not yet in sight. Wijmenga: "More and more organizations want to get rid of their closed Cobol and Linc platforms, and switch to open systems. We have the flexibility required to react to this quickly and adequately." He continues: "The Unisys market has around five to six hundred mainframes worldwide, so that will keep us busy for the time being. There's an even bigger market, however, and that's the IBM mainframes. Around fifteen thousand companies in the US

and Europe make use of these machines, and a large number of them want to switch to open systems. We're currently working at developing a solution for this market."

Unique solution

What makes the Asysco solution so unique? "Three things", says Wijmenga. "To begin with, the speed and reliability with which we do this. Unlike our competitors, our migration takes place fully automatically, where others offer 'lift and shift'. In other words, they take the original Cobol application and recompile it to the new platform. The main disadvantage is that you then once again have a Cobol application. Plus, it requires a lot of manual work. We ensure that the application is fully converted to an object oriented language for the Windows platform.

And so a fully fledged 4GL is formed. Moreover, we can do so without source freezing. In other words: further development can take place even during the migration. We can always implement the last details of the change once finished."

"Another unique point of our system is that we guarantee one hundred percent reliability. After all, companies entrust their crown jewels to us and it's logical that they can become pretty nervous if you can't guarantee that they can carry on working after migration. We can guarantee that. In all the years we've been doing this, we've never had a dissatisfied client."

Strong growth

Asysco is growing strongly thanks to this approach. Wijmenga explains that the company is therefore looking for IT experts who want to help further the success. "We aim to further enrich our migration technology, towards IBM mainframes as I already explained, but we also want to facilitate migration to a full .Net environment. So we're looking for people for that purpose, but also service consultants to supervise the migration projects for clients. That's a fun job for people who enjoy traveling and are looking for variation. After all, one week you're in Dubai and the next in Miami, assisting a metalworker, and next time a government institution or a bank."

Is the location in Coevorden not restricting? "Not really", according to the CTO. "It's a nice place to live, the area is beautiful and the housing still affordable. Much of the preparations take place at our office so it doesn't make much difference where our clients are in the Netherlands or further afield abroad ..." ■

"From Dubai to Miami, for metalworkers and banks alike."