

Large pitfalls in modernizing legacy applications

Coevorden, 26 January 2009 – There are countless companies that are still continuing to use legacy applications - companies that often consider migrating to another platform. However, migration specialist Asysco says that migrations are not always without risk and tells about the pitfalls in modernizing legacy applications.

Figures show that Cobol is still used a lot: in fact there are 310 billion lines of Cobol code used worldwide, 65 percent of which are in business-critical applications. And this number of Cobol lines is increasing by 2.5% per year owing to maintenance or functional modifications. This amounts to five billion lines of code per year. The disadvantages of these legacy applications are the high costs of maintenance and the lack of mainframe personnel. So migration to another platform can quickly lead to cost savings. However, according to Asysco, there are dangers attached to this.

Underestimating testing

Irrespective of whether migrations in companies are undertaken manually or are largely automated, Asysco says that the need for effective testing is frequently underestimated. Most applications in organizations are now thirty years old or older, which means that there is now little available knowledge of these systems. Add to which, the documentation is generally of poor quality. The result of this is that testing the migrated program code is difficult.

Complete source codes

Migration projects are sometimes started when the source code of legacy applications is still not complete. In a migration, it is important to know from where applications derive their functionality. If companies do not devote attention to this, they will discover that a module is missing only in the test phase. This will result in projects turning out more expensive because more work or duplicate work has to be carried out.

No communication with Business

Generally speaking, end users notice little or nothing of the migration. For this reason, Business is often not informed about what is happening. According to Asysco, IT departments are taking a big risk in this since Business is well aware of the costs that are being incurred. This is why companies should draw up an ROI of the migration project in order to continue to retain the involvement of Business.

A lack of the right knowledge

IT departments often think that they have all the knowledge they need for migrations. However, practice indicates that the situation is quite different. As in the case of databases. This is certainly

a problem in migrating with a database like Oracle, for example. Setting up the environment correctly is pretty time-intensive and database managers must know what to do in cases such as tuning and load balancing. Setting up a storage area network also requires more knowledge than organizations expect during this sort of migration.

No shadow running

Once the migration has taken place, the old system is usually no longer used. However, it is essential to maintain mainframe capacity for a longer period. Shadow running is also important in cases like a database restore or in the case of various sorts and types of input file. Neither do organizations always realize that this is an intensive period – a lot of time is involved in it.

Too little practice

Last of all, organizations do not always practice for the moment when the new environment goes live. A migration can have far-reaching consequences for Business. If the new environment does not work, this can seriously affect turnover. So practice before the actual migration is made in order to avoid and resolve unexpected problems. Always involve all relevant departments in this because they must be able to act at times when something goes wrong.

‘Firstly let’s just say that legacy modernization can pay back fast in general,’ says Erik van Rikxoort, CEO of Asysco. ‘In the case of migrations to a different platform, the return on investment is easy to calculate. In practice, we notice that organizations earn back their investment within twelve to eighteen months. And also, even though migrations can be made fully automatically these days, we still notice that companies sometimes underestimate certain aspects, which means that projects last much longer than they actually need to.’