

BCD Cranks Up Services, Training for PHP Deployments

by Timothy Prickett Morgan

Application development tool maker Business Computer Design has never been shy about its commitment to the AS/400 platform as well as its many progeny, and as application development and deployment technology has changed over time, the company has evolved to take advantage of those new technologies. With PHP, as with past development languages, BCD was on the leading edge in getting the technology deployed on the i platform, and now it is benefiting from that forward-thinking strategy.

In particular, BCD says that its professional services business is seeing a good uptake of PHP-related projects. Exactly how much, Eric Figura, director of sales and marketing at BCD, can't say because that is proprietary information for the privately held company and its exclusive development partner, Excelsystems Software Development. But Figura is clearly pleased by the uptake of WebSmart PHP, the variant of its WebSmart toolset that kicks out PHP applications that has been available since May 2007.

"We looked at PHP as another language that would be popular, and we were way ahead of the curve," says Figura. "Our PHP business has been growing nicely, and it even has a lot of usage outside of the i space."

WebSmart PHP is a rapid programming development environment that comes with a slew of templates that hook back into OS/400, i5/OS, and i systems and their applications and databases, but it can also be used to deploy PHP applications on Windows, Linux, or Unix platforms. And according to Figura, customers are using WebSmart PHP to do just that.

The WebSmart ILE tool, which is used to bring RPG applications to the Web and which has been around since the turn of the millennium as a competitor to IBM's WebSphere application server and related development tools, is installed at close to 2,000 organizations today and BCD estimates that a total of 2 million end users sit at applications each day that have been extended using the WebSmart tools. "At this point, the overwhelming number of our installations are still for WebSmart ILE," says Figura, "but these days, WebSmart PHP is garnering as much interest, if not more, among customers." Think of it as a leading indicator for future WebSmart PHP sales.

BCD and Excelsystems are also looking to professional services--a business unit that was established eight years ago--as a means to get revenues in a tough economy where companies want to get a very fast return on investment for software projects. The combined companies have 60 employees, and 20 of them are dedicated to doing professional services of various kinds.

According to Figura, in some cases i shops might do a starter project, perhaps for \$10,000 to Web-enable some RPG applications using either WebSmart ILE or WebSmart PHP, to get their feet wet using either technology. Or they might hand a slightly larger "jump start" project over to BCD's professional services unit, letting them do the front-end work on a project (which obviously costs more). And then in other cases, the coders at BCD and Excelsystems work side-by-side with a company's own programmers, doing pieces of an application modernization or creation project, augmenting internal resources. And in still other cases, companies just hand over the whole project to BCD and Excelsystems. Some of the projects take a week to 10 days, some take months. You can find out more about the professional services that BCD and Excelsystems offer at [this link](#).

"Every year--and I mean every year--services has show significant growth for us," says Figura. "We have some really huge projects and lots of small projects. And the great thing is that we use virtual private networking and GoToMeeting so we very rarely have to go onto a customer site."

This saves money, and it also means that the experts in RPG and PHP who work Excelsystems can do what they do from Sidney, British Columbia, which is nestled on Vancouver Island between Seattle and Vancouver.

To help nurture the PHP on i market, Figura says that BCD will soon provide online training for PHP. We'll keep you posted as to when that launches. At the COMMON annual conference in Reno, Nevada, at the end of April, BCD will be providing a lab session on rapid PHP application development using WebSmart PHP.