2023 IBM I PREDICTIONS, PART 3

Security. Cloud. AI. The IBM i installed base moves with the general IT tide, which makes these hot topics for all. But what about specific IBM i things, like the availability of IBM i jobs and the difficulty in finding a good RPG developer? These are topics we are tackling in our third – and final – round of 2023 predictions.

Bob Langieri, the IBM i recruiter who owns Excel Technical Services, has his pulse on the IBM i job situation, particularly in his Southern California region. 2023 looks to be a mixed bag, job-wise, he says.

"In the IBM i-RPG job market, hiring has been stalled or slower for the last year," Langieri tells IT Jungle. "I am hearing from more RPG developers who have retired, but still want to work part-time. It's pretty normal now to see more people working until the age of 70 or longer. They are a real value, but most companies are ignoring resumes that show their age as

working since 1980 or signs of System/36 or System/38. I feel no need to go back more than 20 years on a resume.

"COVID forced many employers to accept remote workers, especially programmers/software developers," Langieri continues. "So now besides COVID being a reason for working remote, the expense of commuting will force even more people into remote. Employment participation is down as more people have been lured by unemployment checks and government handouts to stay home or thought maybe it's a good time to re-evaluate your career and life."

Richie Palma, an account executive with iTech Solutions Group (acquired by Service Express last year) in Farmington, Connecticut, foresees new hardware being installed into many IBM i shops this year.

"I believe we are going to see

many more IBM i shops making the move to Power10 and external IBM FlashSystem SAN storage, in an effort to harness the power of IBM Flashcopy, hardware-based replication, and big time performance of Power10 and IBM Flashcore modules," he says.

Alan Seiden, principal of Seiden Group in Ho-ho-kus, New Jersey, is bullish about the potential to find IBM i developers in 2023.

"In 2023, companies who put in the effort will be pleasantly surprised at the ease of finding skilled RPG developers," Seiden predicts. "Dissatisfied with old-fashioned rigid management, many are seeking flexibility, meaningful work, appropriate challenge, and growth opportunities. Those companies that staff adequately and cross-train RPG with Web and API technology will be the best-positioned."

Chuck Losinski, director of technical solutions with Fortra

(formerly HelpSystems) foresees fresh perspectives in 2023, along with a focus on succession planning.

"I am seeing this first-hand and expect it to accelerate in 2023," he says. "Experienced Power Systems developers and administrators, often who share the same role, are desperate to leave their systems in good hands. They are working with management to bring in IT talent with zero IBM i experience and mentoring them. To quote one such effort, 'Once they are hooked, they don't want to leave the platform.'

"This brings a fresh look at bringing a modern end-user interface using today's development tools, while the back-end database is leveraged using a familiar tool — SQL," Losinski continues. "In turn, the veterans are looking at the systems' automation tools they already have in place and are taking steps to review setup and 'make things right' before turning over the reins to the up-and-coming 'rising stars.'"

Kevin Beasley, CIO of VAI on Long Island, New York, sees security rising to the top of corporate priorities in 2023.

"Security has become an imperative, even in the IBM i world. Businesses are going to lock down their systems even tighter and also engage third party companies for penetration and vulnerability testing this year," Beasley says. "Part of this will be an uptake of IBM i 7.5, which adds even more levels of security. Also, the ongoing move to the cloud in the IBM i world will continue its steady trend upward."

Patrick Staudacher, an executive recruiter with Talsco, Inc. in Muskego, Wisconsin, predicts the IBM i trends of the past several years continuing, but with a twist.

Remote work: "While we are seeing some openings that require developers to work on-site, the majority of the roles we work on are either 100 percent remote or hybrid (a mix of in office and remote). Remote work has been a game changer for the IBM i community," he says.

Interoperability of the IBM i: "The development of APIs, web services and the use of new tools to extent the reach of RPG applications systems will continue. We are seeing many of our clients lead they. The continued success of the IBM i platform is about making it interoperable with other systems.

Developers who add additional skills to their toolbox will make this happen," Staudacher says.

Strong demand: "Currently we are seeing strong demand on both the direct hire and consulting side of our business. While the economy in 2023 could have some impact on certain industries, we believe this will be minimal due to the retiring RPG workforce and the push for modernization," he says.

Finding good technical help will become harder in 2023, predicts Robert Swanson, a senior partner with CNX Corp., which is based in Chicago, Illinois. Could the market be on the cusp of a rapid uptick in productivity tools sales and usage?

"This may be a slightly myopic viewpoint due to the market we cater to, but we're seeing an unrelenting trend toward the need to 'do more with less' in IT, as skilled, affordable and (most importantly) available developers for IBM i – or really any platform, for that matter – have gotten almost insurmountably difficult and expensive to find, particularly post-COVID," Swanson says. "Propelled largely by the need for applications to support a decidedly more off-site workforce, many companies have amassed quite a backlog of development tasks over the past

few years and can't simply hire their way out of it. So with nowhere else to turn, our expectation/ prediction is that demand for methods and tools to help IT cut development time at these companies will rapidly go into high gear this year. Accordingly, we've been directing nearly all of our development efforts in recent months toward enhancing our low-code/no-code utilities."

Donnie MacColl, the senior director of technical support and GDPR data protection officer at Fortra (formerly HelpSystems), sees IBM i shops recognizing security as a revenue enabler rather than a cost center.

"Fortra's Powertech security solutions and those like it are seen as a revenue enabler not an unnecessary cost," he says. "As an example, if I want to buy something online, I need to trust everything from that supplier, the platform, the application software, the financial systems taking my payment details, the delivery company — everything in the supply chain. IBM Power Systems are very securable and by using mature security solutions and managed security services from a trusted partner like Fortra, organizations can concentrate on their core business and trust the experts to look after their security."

Bob Cancilla has had strong opinions about IBM and the IBM i platform in the past, and he continues to have strong opinion about their futures.

"My advice is to make plans to migrate off the platform," Cancilla writes. "IBM has reduced the resources allocated to the platform and is only a matter of time before they drop it. There are many good tools to modernize, move away from RPG and become platform neutral."