

Steve,

Here are my attempts to address the technical concerns about the platform that we have used for AdDept.

First, some terminology. The operating system that was called “OS/400” for many years is now called “i5/OS.” The name of the hardware has changed from “AS/400” to “i series” to “system i” or perhaps “i5.” For most of its life, the operating system was tied to the hardware: OS/400 was the only operating system that could run on an AS/400, and it could not run on any other system. This is now changing.

### **Is OS/400 outdated?**

The platform is by no means outdated. Anyone who says that it is does not know what he/she is talking about. i5/OS is still the only commercially available operating system that:

1. employs single-level addressing,
2. has a data base below the machine instructions,
3. is totally object-oriented,
4. tightly integrates all operating functions.

I first encountered claims that the AS/400 was outdated in the mid-1990’s at a Midwestern retailer’s headquarters. At the time this company was basing all of its development on a “modern” operating system – OS/2. IBM abandoned marketing of OS/2 years ago, and has now dropped all support for it. Meanwhile IBM has just released announcement of a new system i model that runs on Power 6 processors, the most advanced servers on the market. In addition i5/OS Version 6 supports the existing JS22 blade, a four-core, 4GHz POWER6 blade. The JS22 can run in the BladeCenter H Chassis, which supports up to 14 x86 and POWER blades. This means that for the first time i5/OS can be run on a system for which it is not the host operating system. For years IBM has pointed toward the merging of its two RISC systems (the p series runs AIX), and now it is happening.

Many recent changes in i5/OS were specifically designed to allow native programs to communicate more easily with programs on other systems. Zend and IBM have also recently brought [the web-based language](#) PHP to the system i. The PHP server uses the i5/OS database without running in the native environment. The scripts are not even stored in the native file system.

An underlying reason for TSI’s profitability is the use of system i. If we had targeted any other platform, we probably would have had to rewrite the system four or five times over the last two decades. Programs that we wrote for the AS/400 back in the 80’s still work on the latest versions of the system i. Furthermore, the system is amazingly reliable, and it requires very little day-to-day attention. The system manages its own disks, and there is no need for a data base administrator or system architect. People who use it swear by it, not at it.

We have considered expanding to other platforms several times, but we have never been able to justify the expense and risk of doing so. It is very hard to justify an expense to end users when no additional features are added.

**Will our clients continue to use the i series?**

Some of our clients run many critical applications besides AdDept on the i series. These people have little or no interest in changing.

In other instances our application is the only one running on a small system i. The IT departments (but not the users) would probably prefer that it be housed on some other hardware, and we may be able to accommodate that wish in the near future. However, they also appreciate the value of a system that requires almost no attention.

**Can the data be accessed with a PC system?**

Yes, all AdDept users access the system through either PC's or Macs running 5250 emulation programs. The system also has ODBC drivers that allow virtually all popular programs (e.g., Excel and Access) to get at the raw data. Many of our programming projects make it easier for the users to assemble the data into formats that are the most useful to them. They then either print reports or import files into other programs.