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IMPLEMENTER 12.0

Where's MKS Implementer? Alive and Well At PTC

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It's been years since we could talk about the Big Three of IBM i change management system vendors. Aldon, SoftLanding, and Mortice Kearns Systems have all been gobbled up by bigger software houses whose core business models, alas, do not revolve around the IBM i. And while *IT Jungle* has kept up with the first two, we haven't delivered any insight on the MKS Implementer product that Parametric Technology Corp acquired several years ago--until now.

PTC bought MKS in 2011 for $295.5 million (Canadian). As a developer of computer aided design (CAD) software, Massachusetts-based PTC is a much larger company, with more than 5,000 employees and about $1.2 billion in annual revenue.

PTC clearly thought highly of the application lifecycle management (ALM) software created by MKS, which included not only Implementer but also the Integrity suite that runs on so-called "open" systems like Windows, Linux, and Unix. For more than four years, Implementer was managed under PTC's Integrity umbrella, but that is starting to change, according to Dawn Blohm, the technical support manager for Implementer.

"With the restructuring at PTC, Implementer is under new leadership and a new group," Blohm tells *IT Jungle*. "We've always been moving forward with the product. We put out a new release about every nine months. But now we're under a new business unit and we're getting some more attention."

Blohm intends to drive more awareness and interest in Implementer, a solid and widely used change management system that helps teams of IBM i developers coordinate their programming activities and ensures that source code--usually RPG but also occasionally Java, COBOL, LANSA, CA 2E, and even AS/SET--is handled in a secure and repeatable manner.

Release notes show that PTC has shipped regular updates to Implementer over the years, including version 11.0 in May 2014, version 11.1 in January 2015, and version 11.2 in August. The goal going forward is to ship new releases every nine months, Blohm says, just like in the past.

Three recent Implementer enhancements stand out, Blohm says. At the top of the list is Implementer Update, a Windows-based support tool delivered in version 11.0. The software handles several administrative tasks, including installing Implementer on the IBM i server, keeping the installation refreshed with periodic updates, and assisting in tech support.

When customers do have issues with the IBM i-based change management software, Implementer Update is indispensable, Blohm says. "When you have a support problem and we have to ask you for the request report, the job log, and ask you what the records in this file look like and what IBM PTFs do you have, this diagnostic package gathers all that information into a ZIP file so all a customer has to do push a couple of buttons," she says. "It makes the customer support process so much easier and faster because there isn't as much back and forth."

PTC's customers are doing a lot of work in SQL these days, and that reflects in customer requests. "We increased the size of SQL source member that we handle from 64,000 to 256,000," Blohm says. "People are writing bigger source members than we've ever seen before. We're absolutely trying to keep on top of customer demand for SQL."

The third big area of enhancement has to do with support for IBM's Rational Developer for i (RDi), the primary developer tool used by RPG programmers today. "We absolutely stay current with the releases of RDi," Blohm says. "We're driving more functionality into our RDi plug-in that so developers using RDi can stay in RDi and not flip back and forth to the green screen when they're doing the processes they need to do in Implementer. They can just stay in RDi."

The more times change in the IBM i world, the more they seem to stay the same. While licenses for Implementer aren't flying off the shelves as they did in the heady days of the early 2000s when new regulations prompted companies in the financial services, healthcare, retail, and pharmaceutical industries to get a better grip on source code management, the business hasn't totally dried up either.

"We have the best customer base I could ever imagine working with," Blohm says. "The customer base is largely intact. It's very stable. We have an extremely high renewal rate, because the software works."

Blohm says the PTC Implementer team has personal relationships with a lot of its Implementer customers, which includes names such as Bloodworks Northwest, Fiserv Insurance Solutions, and Nova Scotia Power.

"They learn from us and we learn from them, because they're doing things out there in the real world that we don't do from a support point of view," she says. "So when they start talking about polymorphism of stored

procedures, that's news to us and they will sit on the phone for 15 or 20 minutes and show us what they're doing."

Despite the low profile that the Implementer business has kept over the past few years, there's a degree of steadiness at PTC that may be surprising to an outside observer. Nobody on the Implementer team has fewer than 15 years of experience with the business, and several of Blohm's best Implementer clients continue working with the software as they move from company to company.

The IBM i business is not what it used to be, and each of the Big Three change management vendors has a lower profile than it once did. Aldon, of course, is now part of Rocket Software, while SoftLanding Systems was long ago gobbled up by Unicom Global, a conglomerate with a different culture from that of SoftLanding. While PTC didn't have drama when it bought MKS, there's a growing realization that the Implementer product line could benefit from--and is probably due--a higher profile.

"It seemed like we quietly went away, but we didn't go away," Blohm says. "We have no intention of going away. The main thing customers need to know is we are still alive."

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