

## AS400 Migrations - Fear Sells

Imagine an hourglass where each grain of sand represents someone who knows how to program in RPG. In order to figure out how much sand should go in it we'll have to do a little math.

At the height of its popularity it was generally accepted that at least 250,000 companies were using the AS400 (the AS400 label is being used here as a generic term to include the AS/400, iSeries, System i, and IBM i on Power Systems). Back then small companies could get by with one RPG programmer while large companies, including most of those on the Fortune 500, could have 10 or more RPG programmers. Very few people would say that assuming an average of 2 RPG programmers per company was an overstatement. That average gives us a total of half a million grains of sand for the hourglass.

If the age range for RPG programmers was roughly 35 to 45 in the year 2000 then that would make those same programmers 54 to 64 today. Ready for retirement, right? Let's assume they're numbers are spread out evenly over the age range and they start retiring right now, which would be 2 years before the full retirement age. That means we'll lose half of our RPG programmers in the next 5 years - a quarter of a million grains will flow through the hourglass, bringing the 2 programmers per company average down to 1 programmer per company. Or so IBM's competitors would like to scare you into believing.

The reason this isn't true is because of a 2nd hourglass. The grains in that hourglass represent the number of companies using the AS400. We started out with 250,000 in the year 2000 but close to 120,000 have already fallen to the bottom of that hourglass, meaning they're no longer on the AS400 for one reason or another. At one point the AS400 was estimated to be losing 9,000 companies a year, well before our group of RPG programmers was ready to retire. The number of companies migrating off of the system has recently slowed down significantly so if only another 5,000 companies migrate off of the platform during the next 5 years during the time half of the RPG programmers are retiring then it will still leave us with 250,000 programmers for 125,000 companies, or an average of 2 programmers per company. That's pretty much the same as it was back in 2000. If the number of migrations increases then there will be more RPG programmers than the companies who are left using the AS400 need, giving you a surplus.

We might already be seeing the results of that trend based on the number of RPG programmers who are looking for a job. As this is being written there are at least 210 of them who have registered to say they're looking for work here - <https://board.all400s.com/>.

Even if the worst case scenario comes true and the number of RPG programmers who either retire or find some other line of work increases while your company stays on the platform it won't be a problem. Regardless of what your company's needs are there are plenty of resources out there who can meet those needs.

For example, if there's a lag between the time you need a programmer and the time you find one then a company like [Programmers.io](http://www.programmers.io/as400/) can fill in the gap with one or more experienced RPG programmers (<http://www.programmers.io/as400/>). They have an "if you don't like us then you don't pay us" policy so they come with a pretty solid guarantee.

They're not the only company who can augment your staff whenever the need arises though. Here's another example - [Treeline Solutions](https://www.treelinesolutions.com/ibm-i) (<https://www.treelinesolutions.com/ibm-i>).

Bottom line, if you're on the AS400 and you're worrying about not being able to find anyone who can support it in the future then you're worrying over something that IBM's competitors want you to worry about, not about something you have to actually worry about.