

What is an AS400?

It's time to clear things up. First off, it's not a green-screen computer. An AS400 can use all of the 16,777,216 colors that any modern computer can use.

Some people will say 'wait a minute, the AS/400 was a computer system built back in 1988 that could only display things in black and green, or occasionally black and amber'. That's what it was - not what it is. Trademarked names can become generic names over time. Just ask Bayer (Aspirin), DuPont (Cellophane), Otis Elevator (Escalator), Motorola (Flip phone), Teleprompter (Teleprompter), Thermos GmbH (Thermos), Griswold-Nissen (Trampoline) or Ampex Corporation (Videotape). Every name in parenthesis was trademarked by the company preceding it and all of those trademarked names are used now as generic terms. The same is true for the term 'AS400'. Over time it has come to be used as a generic term covering all of IBM's midrange computers. These systems include the AS/400, the iSeries, the System i, and the IBM i on Power Systems.

Proof of this genericization is easy enough to find. Go to any job board like Indeed, Ziprecruiter, Monster, Glassdoor or Simplyhired, and key in AS400. You'll literally find thousands of jobs using this generic label (I just found 3,114 on Indeed when I did it a minute ago). Then key in the current name of IBM's midrange system - IBM i on Power Systems. This came up with zero jobs. Shortening the name to 'IBM i' came up with 97 jobs.

When I used IBM's own job board the results were similar. Here's a link to IBM's job board - <https://ibm-power-jobs.careerwebsite.com/> You can test it for yourself by keying AS400 and then "IBM i" in the search bar and then checking the number of jobs found at the bottom of the screen (1,000 for the former and 39 for the latter during my test). Now if you really need a job are you going to listen to the people who tell you you should always call the current version of the system by its actual name, or are you going to listen to the people who tell you it's okay to use the generic name (AS400). I guess it depends on how successful you want your search to be.

Even knowing all of this I've still run across a few people who insist you should always call the system by its actual name because that's officially the right name. Fortunately for them they already have jobs.

Aside from those times when you need to find a job, you might ask why anyone should use the generic name instead of the computer system's official name. Well, that's easy enough to answer too.

If you're a vendor who specializes in this market and you want companies to know your product will work on their system, would it make more sense to put the generic name

somewhere on your home page so search engines can find it and tell companies your product will work on their machine, or erase all references to the generic name and only use the official name IBM prefers you to use?

If you work in the HR department for a company that's using an IBM i on Power System would you advertise that you need someone to fill a position using that specific name or would you advertise an open position on the generic name for the machine knowing job hunters are much more likely to be using the generic name during their job hunt.

I'll admit that the existence of AS400 as a generic name definitely makes it easier for competitors to target their sales pitch against a 'legacy system', but that's no excuse for any halfway decent sales rep from IBM, or any internal IT person acting as its direct sales rep, to not be able to successfully make the case that a company should stay on the system (or buy one if it's not already on it).

You might think that's easier said than done but since I've done it I know just how easy it is. And since I'd like the AS400, or the IBM i on Power System, to be used at as many companies as possible I'll share some of the successful arguments you can use. These aren't jargon-filled TCO or CPW arguments either. If you work in an IT department you'll feel comfortable using them with anyone, regardless of how high up their title might be.

Let's start with the Fortune 500 companies. Any company who's on that list can afford to buy any computer system they want, and they have more than enough money to check all of them out ahead of time to make sure they buy the right one. With that in mind here are some of the Fortune 500 companies who bought at least one or more AS400s (I'm going to use the generic term from here on out because saying 'the IBM i on Power Systems' rolls off the tongue like rocks down a hill) - American Express, Best Buy, Big Lots, Campbell Soup, Chevron, Dillards, Duke Energy, EBay, ExxonMobil, FedEx, Home Depot, Walmart, NBCUniversal, Walgreens, 21st Century Fox and Disneyworld, If your company is thinking of moving off of the platform then ask your decision-makers this - what do they know that these Fortune 500 companies don't know?

Maybe they'll surprise you and say those companies don't know anything about your industry. Okay, then let's take a look at some of the companies who are using the AS400 on an industry-by-industry basis to make sure we include your industry.

Banking/Finance - Bank of New York Mellon, BB&T, Citigroup, JP Morgan, Suntrust and Wells Fargo.

Transportation/Logistics - Agility Logistics, Averitt Express, CR England Trucking, Continental Express, DHL Express, Landstar, Old Dominion, PACCAR, Penske, Ryder, UPS and Werner.

Manufacturing - Amway, Anderson Windows and Doors, Ashley Furniture, Borg Warner Automotive, Danaher, Ethan Allen, Hamilton Beach, Huffy, John Deere, Lear Corporation, Masonite, Oshkosh Corp, and Stanley Black and Decker.

Healthcare/Pharmaceuticals - Abbott Labs, Aspen Dental, Cardinal Health, CVS, Express Scripts, Kaiser Permanente, Pfizer, Tenet Healthcare and UHS (Universal Health Services).

Government agencies - the state governments of Florida, Texas, New York, and Illinois; the US Dept of Agriculture and U.S. Customs.

If your industry wasn't included above then let me know what it is in the comments section and I'll give you some examples of companies in your industry you'll recognize.

The next argument you're likely to hear is that it's so old it can't use any of the newer, more efficient programming languages. If they mean programming languages like SQL, Java, Javascript, XML, PHP, JSON, Python, Perl, C, C++, or Ruby then they're just flat out wrong. The AS400 can run all of them.

It can also run other operating systems like Linux and AIX (IBM's version of Unix), which means anything you can run on those operating systems you can also run on the AS400. It can also run other technologies on the system, like a native HTTP server, Apache, and Tomcat, which means it can also be used as a server for web pages.

If you've read this far then you know I haven't even mentioned some of the AS400's biggest strengths yet, things like security for example. This is going to dip into the technical waters a little bit so you might want to do some additional reading until you feel comfortable you can hold your own against any higher ups who might have a background in security. Here's the main case to be made - the AS400 system has far fewer cybersecurity events (CVE's) than any other system out there. If you check out these links it shouldn't be hard to wordsmith the information in them into the sort of plain English your decision-makers can understand. These are the links –

https://cve.mitre.org/about/faqs.html#what_is_cve and <https://cve.mitre.org/cve/> .

Hopefully your company cares enough about security to add weight to these arguments.

As long as we veered into the technical aspects of the system here's a link that will give you all of the type of geek stuff other geeks like to hear -<http://cli.re/LRnAwr>

Stability, or downtime, might also be brought up as an issue by someone who doesn't know what they're talking about but who wants to replace the AS400 with their preferred system anyway. Having worked on an AS400 for over 30 years I can honestly say that downtime was only an issue once - and that was when we set the critical storage warning to 100% (don't ask me why). That's just a personal anecdote. There's a boatload of documentation on the net that will support an argument that the system is the most stable one out there.

Open Source is another area you'll want to know something about before making your case to stay on the system. This link - <https://www.itjungle.com/2017/05/15/open-source-ibm-let-grow/> and this link - <http://ibmsystemsmag.com/blogs/open-your-i/february-2017/open-source-on-i-introduction-and-thoughts/> will provide you with a good start on the subject.

Although the main purpose of this article was to explain that AS400 has become a generic term and can be used to counter competitors' claims that it's an artifact of a bygone day, they'll still be able to respond with a "Me Too" argument to most of the points made above (I borrowed this point from a commentator on the original outline - hopefully he won't mind).

What they won't be able to say is that right now, not in a month from now, the AS400 can talk to an AI machine, Watson, and use it's knowledge inside their programs to make them better. With the generic AS400 we're not talking punch-cards - we're talking about the future being available to every developer with each keystroke. Maybe IBM should teach Watson how to be its sales rep....

#IBMi #AS400 #iSeries