



The Dramatic Mainframe Conversion of Mike Wells

When Mike Wells was recruited from a Fortune 500 company to be Director of Software Development at Ameritas, a mutual life and health insurer with \$35.6 billion in assets, he had a big mission: to help his new employer achieve competitive advantage in an increasingly digital marketplace.

There was just one problem. The majority of Wells' software development experience was on distributed platforms; yet about 70% of his developer workforce at Ameritas was mainframe focused. Coming from a background where automation and visibility were at the forefront of every Java developer, he realized that this presented a challenge in the mainframe arena. Wells was skeptical about whether their tools and processes could provide the speed and agility Ameritas needed to thrive in a fast moving digital marketplace.

Then Wells had a dramatic revelation. The tools and processes that provided the world's Java teams with automation, visibility and insight into code quality could also help modernize development processes on the mainframe. By aggressively adopting better processes and better tools, he and Ameritas have rapidly become leading practitioners of mainframe "mainstreaming"—which empowers developers to work in the same Agile manner across languages and platforms.

As a result, Ameritas can better fulfill its ambitious mission while avoiding the cost, disruption and risk of re-platforming its mainframe applications and data. Wells is also driving significant increases in developer productivity and software quality.

Wells' primary partner in his mainframe efforts is Compuware, which provides him with technology, insights and a listening ear for his innovative ideas. Wells was more than pleasantly surprised to discover that Compuware delivers new solutions and integrations that support Ameritas' mainframe mainstreaming strategy every 90 days. And in at least one case, Compuware actually turned one of Wells' particularly compelling suggestions into a commercially available solution within five months.

"I've never had any vendor on any platform respond to my input so quickly with a tool that so fully met my stated need," says Wells. "Compuware's ability and willingness to support Ameritas' cross-platform Agile strategy is proof positive that

the mainframe can be an integral and highly adaptive element in any company's digital business strategy—if you have the right vision and take the right actions."

The Seeds of Change

Wells' process of discovery vis-à-vis the mainframe had several dimensions. First, he needed metrics. When he first came to Ameritas, he did not have the visibility he needed into what was getting done when and by whom. So he started gathering data that gave him some initial clues about mainframe development processes being the problem in his organization—rather than anything inherent in the way mainframe code could be written, tested and promoted into production.

Wells also saw how the mainframe environment had fragmented over time into hundreds of discrete applications with arcane names that obscured their business function. So he undertook a project that involved capturing the "tribal knowledge" about Ameritas' mainframe applications, categorizing them by business function and coding that taxonomy into the open source SonarQube and Jenkins tools he had used in previous roles.

By using Jenkins to push these now taxonomized applications into SonarQube, Wells' open source software change and quality management tool-of-choice, he could now better monitor and prioritize his team's code writing and QA activities by business need.

Wells was also able to see how much duplicate code was dispersed across all of Ameritas' mainframe environment. "Duplicate code adds to your technology debt and undermines productivity by forcing you to duplicate work," says Wells. "Knowing where that duplication exists can therefore save you time, money and risk."

The Compuware Connection

Compuware has played an important role in Wells' mainframe conversion from the beginning. It was through some initial conversations with his Compuware account manager that Wells first learned about how Compuware's visualization and code quality tools could help streamline mainframe development processes at Ameritas. Through this relationship, Wells learned that many of his observations about the current state of mainframe development jibed with realities at many other enterprise IT organizations.



The most pivotal moment in the relationship between Ameritas and Compuware occurred when Wells visited Compuware's Detroit headquarters. It was there that Wells had his most intense and complete discussions with Compuware's leadership—including CEO Chris O'Malley and members of Compuware's product management organization.

Those discussions wound up affecting both companies' technology strategies. For Compuware, Wells' observations were real eye openers. When Compuware's leadership heard how Wells was using his existing open source tools to better manage development on the mainframe, they had something of an epiphany. Recognizing that Wells' approach could make sense for an entire generation of new mainframe leadership, Compuware began to focus on integrating its solutions with leading open source tools.

In other words, rather than building new mainframe-specific capabilities that paralleled those already available for the broader distributed/web market, Compuware could simply empower customers like Ameritas to manage their mainframe applications and data in the same manner as their non-mainframe applications and data. This "mainstreaming" approach would not only bring agility to the mainframe. It would also help unify mainframe and non-mainframe code into a single, highly-manageable repository of digital business logic.

"Mike's practical approach to his immediate challenges at Ameritas were clearly applicable to mainframe customers everywhere," says Steve Kansa, Compuware Product Manager. "By adopting his approach ourselves, we saw how we could make the mainframe a more accessible platform for anyone who—like Mike—had little or no mainframe expertise, but high aspirations for their company's overall software agility."

For Wells and Ameritas, these discussions would lead to the discovery that in Compuware they had a partner in their efforts capable of quickly turning great ideas into great solutions. That's because Compuware had been through its own Agile transformation—and was now turning solution ideas into solution deliverables every 90 days like clockwork.

Compuware was thus able to speak to Wells about mainframe agility from direct first-hand experience. Compuware was also able to act upon Wells' suggestions with unprecedented speed. The meeting in Detroit took place in July. By the following January, Compuware delivered integrations between Topaz, Jenkins and SonarSource to their entire customer base.

Above and beyond these specific integrations, Ameritas and Compuware gained something even more valuable: a powerful shared vision of a future in which mainframe applications and data are leveraged with the same ease and adaptability as the rest of the enterprise's digital resources.

"Compuware helped complete the conversion in my thinking about the mainframe by demonstrating that all code can be subject to the same principles, processes and tools—regardless of platform or syntax," said Wells. "That bodes very well for a company like Ameritas that has so much invested in COBOL applications."

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