

# At AMPORTS Change Management & Best Practices Drive IT Success

## An Amports Success Story





## Change-Management Reluctance Turns into Change-Management Enthusiasm as IT Director Implements Solutions and Best Practices from Midrange Dynamics

With only two or three programmers in an IBM i development shop, a change-management application isn't always needed as long as the team communicates closely with one another and manually tracks code changes. But that's not a sustainable practice when growth or other demands require adding more programmers to the team. This was the situation that Gordon Leary, director of IT for AMPORTS, Inc. (AMPORTS), found himself in as his company's development needs grew. It was becoming increasingly clear that his expanding team of programmers needed tools to help them better regulate and organize software-change processes, and yet he worried such tools could bog down development efforts.

"We were doing fine when we had just two programmers, but soon there were five of us and we quickly began bumping heads on different projects," says Gordon. "On one hand, it seemed like it was time to consider a change-management application that could

better organize and track our ever-expanding development projects, but on the other hand, I wasn't fully convinced we needed it. Some of my programmers had used change-management applications in the past when they were working for banks, government agencies, or big companies, so they knew the benefits this would bring to our shop. However, I was concerned it would create a bunch of extra work and headaches for us, especially when we needed to do urgent, yet relatively simple changes."

AMPORTS is a provider of logistics solutions that vehicle manufacturers use to help manage the movement of cars and trucks through various shipping ports located across the U.S. and Mexico. Gordon and his developers build and maintain the company's extensive IBM i-based port-tracking system.

Despite his reservations, Gordon began evaluating vendors of IBM i change-

management applications through the COMMON user group community he had been involved with for many years.

"I had been familiar with most of the change-management application vendors who regularly attend the annual COMMON conferences," says Gordon. "So I spent time talking to each one, watching demos, and running a trial of a few of the products using a demo environment that I set up. I took my time looking at functions and talking with vendor representatives and in the end was most impressed with Midrange Dynamics. Not only did Midrange Dynamics have an excellent reputation within the COMMON community, but the functionality of MDCMS and its associated applications most closely fit our needs. Ultimately, it came down to a trust factor. I got a strong impression that they would work with us to implement the change-management processes and functions we required while being responsive to our support and training needs."

### Implementation Begins for MDCMS and Other Products from Midrange Dynamics

Gordon made the decision to purchase MDCMS along with MDOpen so that all change-management functions would work seamlessly with the RDi programming environment in which he and all of his programmers work. In addition, Gordon purchased MDXREF for object cross-referencing and MDRapid to reduce downtime during software rollouts. An implementation and training program was put into place, and with that, the transition from manual processes to a software-driven change-management methodology commenced.

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AMPORTS Inc.

with a plan to clean up our software-development objects," says Gordon. "They ran a lot of audits against our systems to help us find and clean up problem areas. They also took the time to learn how our development and business processes work so as to tailor MDCMS to our needs. We set up test projects and got fully trained on MDCMS and the other allied products that we purchased. It was a very methodical process that was worth the effort."

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processes,” continues Gordon. “It was clear that through years of working with so many different companies, Midrange Dynamics has really honed these best practices, and they are very willing to share that extensive knowledge with customers.”

### Reluctance Turns into Enthusiasm

Despite his initial reluctance about whether change management would save time and lessen confusion for his relatively small team, once he

and his team were up and running on MDCMS, that reluctance disappeared.

“In the places where I thought change management might slow us down, I soon found that wasn’t the case,” says Gordon. “I really like how MDCMS organizes and containerizes our projects through its request-for-promotion (RFP) process. All of the elements that are needed for a development task, including the checking out of objects, are designated right there in the RFP so programmers don’t lose track of what they’re doing or step on each other’s toes. Plus, we gained improved collaboration between our team members by designating through the RFP the people who can test programs and the people who can promote programs.”

Using the features of MDCMS and the best-practice methodologies provided by Midrange Dynamics, Gordon and his team built development and testing environments, and they began to automatically log all of his department’s development activities.

“Having visibility into what we are working on is a significant benefit for us, and the logging and reporting capabilities of MDCMS make this possible,” says Gordon. “Being able to report to management and to the auditors what we’re doing as a department, and why we’re doing it, and how much we’re accomplishing helps us justify our existence and obtain the resources we need for growth. That’s big.”

“Not long after implementing the MDCMS application, AMPORTS purchased another company,” continues Gordon. “As a result, we had to implement massive changes to our code because the business logic of the acquired

company was much different from ours, and we had to incorporate that logic into our own. It ended up being a massive project, but having MDCMS to help us coordinate all of the development surrounding this was an enormous help.”

Today Gordon and his team are in the midst of another major development project that entails making their port-management systems more easily integrated with many kinds of external systems through APIs.

“We’re now in the process of migrating our systems toward an external-procedure, API-based model,” says Gordon. “Making our business logic accessible through multiple types of user interfaces is a big evolution of our software. The ability to modularize the many components of this type of project through the RFP process is really helping to simplify things. For instance, we can develop an API for a particular function, which might be working with as many as 100 different programs, and organize that effort easily with an RFP. I can put the job in front of a developer and we both know that everything is managed in one place.”

“The MDXREF tool from Midrange Dynamics has been indispensable for this endeavor as well,” adds Gordon. “We use it to quickly trace all of the business logic within programs, seeing every program and procedure that touches a file. It used to be we had to do these kinds of searches manually, but now we have a tool that does it all for us. MDXREF has been a significant timesaver.”

### Software Deployment Downtime Goes to Near Zero

Prior to implementing MDCMS and the other related tools purchased from Midrange Dynamics, whenever any database changes

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needed to be implemented, it required periods of downtime for AMPORTS, but given that the company’s systems need to be available 24x7, these could be costly, stressful events. When Gordon learned about MDRapid during his MDCMS evaluation, and how it works in concert with MDCMS to dramatically reduce, and in some cases eliminate, downtime during database updates, he was excited to give it a try.

“Before MDRapid, it was always a pain to figure out a time when we could get everyone off the system in order to do file changes,” says Gordon. “We often delayed development projects because the accompanying downtime was too disruptive, or we would do a lot of workarounds to get our changes rolled out. But as soon as we implemented MDRapid, it immediately solved that problem. This





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was a huge gain for us as we were able to start on the database-related development projects that we've been putting off."

MDRapid uses high-availability technology in conjunction with change-management functions to convert IBM i database files with minimal interruption. MDRapid maintains all changes in a safe staging environment. If there is any kind of interruption (such as a hardware problem, power outage, or subsystem termination), it is easy to restart the conversion process. Applications and data remain unaffected until everything is ready to move the new files into production.

## Support That Meets a High Standard

Quality and responsiveness of support were significant factors that Gordon considered when he evaluated change-management application vendors. During his career, regardless of the features of the product he was evaluating, if he didn't get a good impression about a company's support, either from his peers at other companies who use the product or as he spoke to the vendor's representatives, he would avoid selecting that vendor.

"Having been part of the COMMON community for a long time, I've learned the vendors that are good and those that are not," says Gordon. "If a company doesn't have a great technical support staff, I'm probably not going to give them my business. I always tell people that I want vendors I can trust personally and trust with my company's business. I want the vendors we choose to be partners in our mutual success."

"As I did my evaluations, I heard good things about Midrange Dynamics, and they haven't disappointed," continues Gordon. "If ever we have questions, they get back to us in a timely way. Most importantly, they don't just come back to us with an answer, they consistently provide us with the right answer. They make the effort to really understand our problem before responding."

"I'm very impressed with everybody I've worked with at Midrange Dynamics," Gordon concludes. "They're all top-notch people who are passionate about their products and change-management best practices, which in turn makes us passionate about these as well. They are regularly enhancing and updating their products, and it is a piece of cake to install their updates. The more they put into their products, the more we continue to benefit." |