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The Bottom Line: Protecting Your Software Dollars

For most of us, today's office software includes a mixture of both Windows-based "GUI" applications and traditional, character-based systems. We use Windows for e-mail, word processing, and spreadsheets but often find ourselves relying on software that was written several years ago for the daily "nuts and bolts" transactions that run our businesses. Programs for invoicing, purchasing, inventory, and accounting were often written in COBOL to run on "dumb" character terminals.

COBOL has been the programming language of choice for business since the early sixties. Most organizations still run COBOL programs today and continue to staff IT departments to maintain the legacy systems, which typically run on aging mainframe and super-mini computers.

The benefits of legacy systems are immeasurable: these are stable programs that contain the business rules of the company, are familiar to the staff who use them and provide a wealth of history in their files. In most cases they have already been paid for. These character-based programs may not have the modern bells-and-whistles, but they are trustworthy and crucial for daily operations.

The dilemma-especially with the Y2K looming-is that the "vintage" hardware required to keep using the programs is expensive to maintain. Older hardware platforms are usually proprietary in nature, difficult to network, and may become unreliable over time. Unfortunately, programs written for these older systems are not always readily portable.

The solution may be to locate a suitable modern package and replace the older software. In many cases, however, there simply isn't a suitable replacement available or the cost of tailoring a package to meet your needs is prohibitive. It may be difficult to justify abandoning the considerable investments already made in creating the existing software and data. If this



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scenario sounds familiar, investigate a software migration.

Porting legacy systems to a modern platform is an alternative that deserves consideration. This strategy preserves prior investments in software, is far less expensive than implementing replacement software, and is transparent to the user community. A rehosting project will remove the proprietary elements of your applications and ensure that your trusted programs and data survive on a modern platform with little disruption to operations. Other benefits are that the new equipment will be readily available to your existing network, will vastly outperform most legacy systems and will integrate smoothly with your Windows environment.