



Case Study

Staffing & App Services



JF Fabrics Solves Risk of Retiring IBM i Resources with Fresche Staffing Services

“Initially we were reluctant to outsource our IBM i environment. But we were growing rapidly and needed additional help. Fresche provided us with outstanding IBM i application support and expert-level development expertise. And their onboarding process and analytical tools ensured productivity in very short order. They’ve now become a real part of our IT staff and surpassed our expectations.”

— Kimberley Hovesen-Krasa, JF Fabrics

Fresche Staffing & Application Services

Key Features

A best-practice support organization backed by a pool of experienced resources using formalized support procedures

Highly automated analysis, drill-down and documentation tools to understand IBM i applications, expose business rules and speed onboarding of resources

A flexible application support partnership that can range from complete outsourced support to periodic staff augmentation

Fresche’s deep experience in application modernization for planning and executing an application modernization strategy

Background

JF Fabrics is the leading Canadian wholesaler/distributor of Home Decorative Fabrics, Tapes and Trim, Drapery Hardware, Wallcovering and Area Rugs. Their highly diversified customer base numbers 15,000 globally and includes large Retailers, Designers, Upholsterers and Manufacturers in both the retail and hospitality sectors. JF Fabrics runs an IBM i-based ERP application to manage critical business functions.

This ERP system originated in the 1990s as a package called MIS Spirit. Since that time, the application has been continually modified and enhanced to meet JF Fabrics’ needs as the company grows and evolves. The application was originally written entirely in COBOL, and some RPG programs have since been developed. JF Fabrics has also developed some graphic user interfaces to the application.

Challenge

JF Fabrics has grown significantly since it was founded 30 years ago, requiring its IT department to be innovative and to implement a variety of solutions. By early 2014, the company’s rapid growth and the pending retirement of key IT resources meant that there would soon be an issue maintaining and developing the functionality of the IBM i systems. Business was advancing quickly, and there was already a growing backlog of requests for maintenance, integration and new sales channels.

JF Fabrics needed to find a way to replace the retiring resources. But they wanted to avoid having all technical expertise vested in just a few key people. They were also concerned about ramp-up time, as their highly complex systems had been developed to meet the needs of a very large and diversified client base. In addition, they hoped to gradually modernize their IBM i systems to take advantage of modern GUI, Web and mobile solutions. The company began to search for a way of responding comprehensively to all of their diverse requirements.

"Fresche's Discovery service analyzed and documented our IBM i environment and then their onboarding process had their developers up-to-speed on our systems in no time. Their X-Analysis tool removes all guesswork —every application object is fully documented, with all calls, dependencies, data links, etc."

*- Anil Jugdeo
I.T. Operations,
JF Fabrics*

"Finding new resources is a challenge. How do you locate people with all of the skills that our business requires? With Fresche on-board, we now have access to an entire IBM i-centric company with tools, deep expertise, analysts and integration experts. We no longer think in terms of searching for specific individuals and instead, we can focus on our future."

*- Julie LaCapruccia
Vice President, Operations,
JF Fabrics*

Solution

After conducting a search and consulting with partners, JF Fabrics chose Fresche's Staffing & Application Services offering. The engagement started with Fresche performing a rapid Discovery service that included interviews, shadowing and code analysis to quickly understand JF Fabrics' business, users and applications. Key to this exercise was use of Fresche's X-Analysis suite to fully examine and graphically document JF Fabrics' IBM i applications and expose the full set of business rules that were embedded in the application code.

After Discovery, the onboarding process was greatly accelerated by X-Analysis, which became one of the core tools for ongoing development and testing. After becoming familiar with the system, Fresche became an integral part of JF Fabrics' IT team and began supporting the IBM i applications and dealing with the backlog of requests for new functionality.



100% application knowledge transfer through automated documentation



60% faster onboarding of new resources



ROI: 30% overall reduction in labor costs for IT staff

Result

Since JF Fabrics and Fresche began working together, the backlog has been significantly reduced and Fresche has started supporting JF Fabrics' business with new development efforts. Fresche brought decades of application support experience and the skills to address break fixes, front-line support, enhancements and new code development. In addition, Fresche employed its experience with document sharing tools, coding standards, formalized prioritization processes, regular governance reviews and dashboards of key performance indicators. It also approached all of its tasks with an eye toward improvement and modernization.

Best of all, business continuity was assured: Fresche's skilled team, using highly proven tools backed by Fresche's entire support organization, meant that JF Fabrics no longer had to think about resources to support their IBM i. The Fresche support organization learns from every engagement, so JF Fabrics was actually benefiting from dozens of other support engagements. As part of the JF Fabrics IT team, Fresche supplied the peace of mind to concentrate on business, not the IBM i.

About Fresche Solutions

Companies running RPG, COBOL, CA 2E SYNON and Java applications rely on Fresche for comprehensive, automated solutions that optimize IBM i systems and help take advantage of technologies such as Web, Mobile, Cloud and RPGOA on IBM i. Our portfolio:

- GUI, Web & Mobile - Easy replacement of green screens and development of customer-facing Web applications
- Staffing & Application Services - A highly seasoned team of IBM i experts who can take on the support of your entire IT department
- IT Strategy Services - Services that help you understand what you have, what you need, and how to start modernizing
- Analysis & Productivity - Automated tools to analyze and document your entire application and data environment
- Code & Database Modernization - Services and automated conversion tools to move to Java, DDL, etc.
- Reporting & Document Distribution - Solutions that provide real-time information to help everyone in the organization

FRESCHESOLUTIONS

Learn other ways Fresche helps customers eliminate risk and ensure business continuity

<https://www.freschesolutions.com/solutions/staffing-application-services>