Application decommissioning

Set data free from your legacy applications

Reduce costs | Avoid risk | Enhance access | Achieve compliance

www.macro4.com
Application decommissioning: the cost-effective alternative to legacy systems support

Many organizations feel forced to keep aging business applications running way beyond their use-by date – because they contain critical historical data that must stay accessible. This information may be needed for customer service or operational reasons, or to comply with industry regulations.

Yet keeping obsolete systems alive – just to view the data – puts a real strain on resources. Aging applications steadily consume IT budget in areas such as maintenance charges, staffing and data center costs.

There is, however, a simple alternative. Macro 4 provides a tried and tested process for decommissioning legacy applications from any platform.

We can extract data from any legacy system and store it in a secure, online archive. The data is easily accessible to end users, either from screens that mimic the original application or in a new format chosen by the business. The legacy application is no longer needed and can be switched off immediately.

This approach is ideally suited to core applications that have accumulated large volumes of data over many years, such as billing records, financial transactions and customer history, together with documents and images. It is the perfect solution for decommissioning a whole range of applications – from bespoke mainframe systems to proprietary software, including Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solutions from SAP® and Oracle®. Whatever its source, data from multiple applications can be brought together in a single, low-cost, easily maintained system and viewed via a web browser, Windows or Citrix thin clients.
Macro 4's application decommissioning solutions have helped leading organizations to:

- Shut down costly legacy applications that drain the IT budget
- Slash software, hardware and support costs
- Raise productivity and service levels by providing faster user access to legacy customer data
- Reduce reliance on scarce and expensive legacy IT skills
- Release IT resources to focus on innovation
- Meet compliance obligations by retaining historical data in a read-only, legal archive

“The Macro 4 system allowed secure access to significant volumes of historical transactional data without the need and cost of migration. This was by far the best solution for us.”

Maggie Bray, Finance change programme manager, Lombard
Major changes in business or IT strategy often leave organizations with obsolete applications that are no longer going to be actively used. One example is a merger which results in the IT department inheriting a set of duplicate business systems. Other scenarios include data center consolidation initiatives or the installation of new strategic business applications such as ERP systems.

Many of these legacy applications contain vital historical data that the organization cannot afford to lose, so pulling the plug is not a viable option. Application decommissioning is a far simpler and more cost-effective way of keeping legacy data accessible, compared with the alternatives:

**Eliminating legacy support costs**

Keeping legacy applications running purely to view the data is an expensive undertaking. Software and hardware maintenance charges, IT support and data center overheads all add up to significant costs.

To make matters worse, older technology often costs more to maintain. Vendors may charge extra for support, or withdraw support altogether. Older applications will in many cases be incompatible with new operating systems and database versions, and they can be harder to fix when they go wrong.

The IT skills required to keep older systems running tend to be in short supply, so end up costing more. Newer staff, who are unfamiliar with the applications, may have problems extracting information needed by the business. Firefighting legacy application issues rapidly soaks up resources and diverts the IT team from more strategic initiatives.

**Avoiding the burden of data migration and application development**

Migrating legacy data to new applications is rarely viable, as the sheer volume of data would impair application performance. Additional disk space and backup storage would also be required, at significant cost.

Similarly, rewriting legacy applications using new technology, just to support read-only access, is resource intensive for the IT department, and costly if undertaken by a third party. A new enterprise system may be replacing dozens of different legacy applications and it would be impractical to rewrite them all.

Simply writing legacy data in a raw format to tape, or other offline storage, isn’t the answer either. Separated from the original application, the raw data will be out of context, slow to access and difficult to search through.
National Grid Gas

Finding a rapid solution to the legacy data challenge

**CUSTOMER CHALLENGE**
- Maintain fast access to twenty years of pipeline work history data
- Avoid the high costs and lengthy timescales involved in migrating large volumes of old data to new systems
- Comply with quality standards monitored by industry regulator Ofgem

**KEY BENEFITS**
- Significant cost savings compared with other alternatives considered
- Rapid implementation, minimizing the burden on the IT department
- Fast access to legacy work history records to support staff efficiency throughout the UK
- Full compliance with industry regulations for data retention

National Grid Gas (formerly Transco) implemented Macro 4’s application decommissioning solution to maintain ongoing access to twenty years of pipeline work history data. The project involved integrating legacy information from four IBM mainframes and eight ICL mainframes and was part of a strategic program to unify computer systems operated by the twelve pre-privatization British Gas regions.

It was essential to retain quick, easy access to the legacy work history records. They included pipeline specifications and details of previous implementations. The data needed to be viewed when planning future maintenance. It was also required for compliance reasons because National Grid Gas is assessed by the industry regulator, Ofgem, on the quality of its information.

The solution, based on Macro 4’s Columbus software, runs on a Windows server at the National Grid Gas Hinckley data center. Employees throughout the UK are able to access the information on-screen from their PCs.

“The information was originally stored in very different formats on twelve separately run mainframes. We wanted to avoid the resource and technical burdens of complex data migration. We looked at various alternatives but this solution was the most cost effective and gives us virtually instant on-screen access,” said Rob Yewer, an IS co-ordinator at National Grid Gas.

“We were looking for the fastest, most cost-effective way of pooling the data and keeping it live and accessible.”

Rob Yewer
IS Co-ordinator,
National Grid Gas
A proven decommissioning process – 8 simple steps to success

Macro 4’s expert application decommissioning approach has been successfully implemented many times over, and on a large scale.

Working closely with our customers’ in-house teams or IT service suppliers, we run through a well-defined process. At the end of this process, customers feel confident about switching off their legacy applications. Their critical data has been moved to a secure, easily maintained, online archive. Easy access to the data by users, who may be unfamiliar with the original legacy application, is a key factor in our approach. Comprehensive search facilities allow users to swiftly locate the information they need. The archived data can also be mined, analyzed and exported to third party applications.

1 Business analysis
We run a workshop to analyze the customer’s business requirements: what data needs to be retained and for how long? How do current users access data and navigate between different screens? How will this change over time and what queries and information requests will need to be satisfied?

2 Systems analysis
We study the application and the wider IT environment to define the scope of the task. Where is the data located and in what format – for example database tables, documents, such as statements and correspondence, or scanned images?

3 Data extraction
Next we assess the best way to extract the data from the legacy system. This could be in the form of individual database tables, transactional reports, formatted documents or a combination of all three. For example, we may extract transaction history as database records and also take electronic copies of invoice documents, in a print-spool format.

4 Process the data
Having extracted the original data we need to ensure that it makes sense to business users. We consider any real-time calculations that the application performed, for example to display totals after tax. We can also translate data stored as codes into meaningful information on screen so that it can be understood by users who are unfamiliar with the original application – for example, ‘code 01’ could be displayed as ‘monthly billing’.

5 Create virtual screen views
Using specialist tools, we re-assemble the data to compile virtual screen views: the screens that users will see when they access the archive. Customers usually choose to replicate the screens of the original legacy application, as they are familiar to users, they display data in context and are easy to navigate.

6 User Acceptance Testing
We create a prototype system using sample data and test it with business users. They work through typical scenarios to satisfy themselves that the archive provides easy access to all of the data that they need.

7 Archive the data
Upon successful completion of User Acceptance Testing, we process the full database and populate the Columbus archive, which resides on a secure server. The data is compressed and stored in a read-only format, with appropriate access restrictions. Columbus can be accessed as a standalone system, or integrated with other applications, to improve accessibility and productivity.

8 Switch off the application
Once all critical data has been transferred to the Columbus archive, the original application can be switched off. Where appropriate, hardware can be retired or re-assigned to support new business systems.
RWE npower

Rationalizing the billing environment and increasing responsiveness to customers

CUSTOMER CHALLENGE

- Cut the cost and complexity of maintaining multiple billing systems
- Provide easy access to important historical information, including meter readings, customer histories and correspondence

KEY BENEFITS

- Significantly lower systems maintenance overheads
- Greater responsiveness to customer service requests through improved access to data
- A more efficient billing infrastructure
- Compliance with industry data retention requirements

npower, one of the UK’s largest electricity suppliers, has used Macro 4’s application decommissioning solution to maintain the availability of key legacy billing data from five million customers. The information was originally located on disparate systems, at several different sites, as a result of previous mergers and acquisitions. “We were operating four core billing systems, as well as around twelve smaller systems. Maintaining the separate systems demanded significant IT and administrative effort,” explained Trevor Abbott, senior support analyst at npower.

The systems contained a wealth of useful information in addition to billing data – including meter readings, customer histories, correspondence and customer service notes. The data is essential for customer relationship management and the company is legally obliged to retain it.

"We knew that decommissioning these systems and consolidating the billing infrastructure would increase efficiency and help us to deliver a consistently high standard of service to all of our customers. One of the challenges of consolidation was finding a simple way to retain the information held on our original systems and keep it easily accessible," added Abbott.

Macro 4’s solution met npower’s requirements in terms of being easy to implement, yet able to cope with the individual data formats produced by the different systems.

Once extracted, data was compressed, enabling billions of records to be stored cost effectively on a single server. The information can now be accessed quickly over npower’s network, within any number of business applications.

"Macro 4 has given us an incredibly simple, flexible way of addressing the legacy data challenge. It has helped us rationalize our billing environment, free up manpower from maintaining legacy systems and give customers a more responsive service.”

Trevor Abbott
Senior Support Analyst, npower
Why Macro 4?

Macro 4 has been successfully implementing application decommissioning solutions for over fifteen years. We work with organizations in all major market sectors, including financial services, utilities, manufacturing, retail and the public sector.

Our customer engagements are diverse, ranging from small-scale projects to decommission a single application, right through to major implementations involving several hundred systems, located on multiple hardware and software platforms.

All of our projects have been delivered on time and on budget, frequently achieving seven figure cost savings. Our professional services team provides expert guidance throughout, to ensure that every decommissioning project runs smoothly and meets the customer’s business objectives.

Macro 4 software solutions are available for outright ownership, as hosted applications and as software as a service (SaaS).

For more information on Macro 4 products and services visit www.macro4.com.