

# SYNON *case study*

## Integrating Synon/2 with Maapics DB



For over 30 years, Timegate Computer Services has provided systems development and consultancy services for the IBM Mainframe and Midrange environments. They are part of the Pi Group, which incorporates a growing number of specialist Computer Service companies.

Timegate is one of the leading suppliers of bespoke applications for IBM's mid-range. They have an application development team of over 30 people dedicated to the AS/400 and were one of the first sites to install the AS/400 in 1988.

Timegate have been Synon/2 users since early 1989 and are one of the UK's largest Synon/2 development teams. They have developed a variety of Synon/2 applications which are now fully implemented in many different organisations.

### **Synon/2 a strategic decision**

Tim Woolley is the Synon/2 Consultancy Manager at Timegate. He explains 'When we bought Synon/2, we recognised that it was to be a strategic decision in terms of our AS/400 development activities.'

Because of this a great deal of effort was put into evaluating Synon/2, developing a strategy for using it effectively and training our development staff to use Synon/2 properly.'

### **Exactng requirements for CASE**

'Our blueprint of requirements was detailed and exacting. We were looking for an AS/400 CASE tool that would:-

- encourage the use of good design methodology
- increase development productivity
- cope with large, complex applications
- yield higher quality applications
- reduce post-implementation
- enable us to prototype

- enhance job satisfaction
- provide adequate system documentation
- and be well supported now and in the future.

After investigating the claims of several AS/400 CASE tools, it was clear that Synon/2 was by far the most comprehensive; not just functionally but also in the background support such as education and help desk.'

### **Integration as well as 'Green field'**

'Since we purchased Synon/2, we have tackled a variety of Synon/2 projects, including new 'green field' systems, extensions of packages such as Maapics, extensions of bespoke systems and various maintenance activities.'

From the beginning we realised that Synon/2 was much more than just an RPG or COBOL program generator. Synon/2 is designed to be an integrated CASE tool, and in practice we have been able to develop higher quality applications more quickly using Synon/2. Not just stand alone applications, but applications which must be integrated with existing systems as well.'

### **Synon/2 skills, sought after and enjoyed**

'Our development team have taken to Synon with enthusiasm and dedication. Within a month of the first courses we found ourselves able to tackle Synon/2's standard facilities with ease. And although it did take longer for us to attain the "expert" status, I believe that is largely because Synon/2 is such a powerful, comprehensive product. We find now that newcomers to Synon/2 pick it up much more quickly, having "experts" on hand to help.'

There is no doubt that our Synon/2 development staff much prefer using Synon/2 to other traditional methods.

**'Timegate Computer Services, a leading supplier of bespoke applications for IBM's mid-range.'**



**Tim Woolley**  
Synon/2  
Consultancy  
Manager of  
Timegate  
'In our experience  
we have found  
Synon/2 to be  
invaluable for  
developing high  
quality  
enhancements to  
existing systems.'

#### **The business perspective**

'It has become very clear to me that just knowing how to use Synon/2, the product, is not enough. Other complementary skills such as Business Analysis and Data Analysis are needed for the full potential of Synon/2 to be realised. These skills are as useful and important as technical skills because Synon/2 helps you to think in business terms.

It is also important to adopt a disciplined approach to using Synon/2, and to invest time in planning and data modelling - procedures that a good RPG analyst/programmer should be doing anyway.'

#### **Can Synon/2 extend non-Synon/2 systems?**

Tim continues 'Every potential Synon/2 user I meet wants to know the answer to this question! It is a commonly held belief that Synon/2 can only be used on 'greenfield' sites. This is simply not true.

In our experience we have found Synon/2 to be invaluable for developing high quality enhancements to existing systems. It is usually quite straightforward too! Synon/2 is indeed an excellent data modelling tool which encourages good database design. And we have been pleasantly surprised that anomalies in existing databases can even be corrected when building existing files into a Synon/2 model.

Implementing packages where possible, is generally a good idea, but it is vital to check that package databases are well designed and do indeed match the reality of the business requirements. We have also found in practice that developing a bespoke Synon/2 application may well prove to be a more cost-effective option than buying a traditional package.'

#### **Quality, robust systems with Synon/2**

'Of the systems that we have written with Synon/2 I would say we have achieved a healthy increase in 'up front' productivity, a major increase in the quality and robustness of the systems developed and a remarkable reduction in post-implementation support and maintenance.

These systems include a test certificate/evaluation system, enhancements to Maapics and a 'green field' financial leasing system. Each system tested Synon/2 to the full and it came through with flying colours.

Our clients are more than pleased with the results of Synon/2 and almost all have bought Synon/2 for themselves!'

#### **Enhancing Maapics DB with Synon/2**

'Enhancing Maapics DB with Synon/2 has proved to be much easier than expected. The Maapics DB database is well designed, consistent and well documented, which means that the creation of Synon/2 data models is straightforward. We have been careful only to import the files and fields which are actually needed, which means that our Maapics Synon/2 models are very streamlined.

Among our Synon/2 enhancements to Maapics DB, are the creation of customised picking lists, the maintenance of an order/invoice history, and a controlled warehouse system. The Synon/2 generated picking lists and order/invoice history have even been tailored manually to work with Maapics II, direct files and all.

We have been surprised at how easy it is to set up the Synon/2 model defaults to create Maapics style screens automatically. Having done so, we have been able to rapidly construct prototype applications. These have proved to be extremely useful, since the end-users are typically new to Maapics and the AS/400 and have had difficulty in visualising the finished product.

#### **Protecting our investment for tomorrow**

'Timegate have been impressed with Synon as a company, and we are confident that they have our future interests at heart. Synon as an organisation are currently investing over 20% of their turnover back into Research and Development.

Synon/2 application models and designs are held independent of the AS/400 operating system which I believe is unique. This gives Synon/2 an enormous advantage over other tools, since it enables the future regeneration of applications developed now, to take advantage of new technologies like cooperative processing.

Synon have also encouraged their users to say what they would like to see in future products and services. This User feedback then plays an active part in the future enhancement of Synon's products and services.

At Timegate, we believe that we are successful when our customers reap the benefits of the applications we implement for them. Synon/2 has undoubtedly contributed to our success, since we have been able to deliver high quality business solutions, more quickly using Synon/2. We look forward to a successful future with Synon/2.'