You Call it Legacy. I Call it Production.

The IT world is moving fast according to the pundits. You may read the latest round of articles that tell you about microservices and cloud-first, or cloud-only organizations who are using development strategies to embrace DevOps and the inevitable shift towards next-generation platforms.

Containers, clouds, microservices, DevOps, Serverless…and Legacy!

Tired of buzzword bingo? You're not alone. One of the most common themes that we see among many of those who are pushing us toward the next platforms is that we keep hearing about "legacy IT". The word legacy is thrown around as if we are supposed to feel bad that it is still here. The reality is that what most leading edge pundits call legacy, is what 90+% of organizations call production.

As a firm believer in leaning forward, I may even be accused of being a little too far over my skis as some like to say. What I make a point of doing is keeping a foot firmly planted in today's infrastructure at the same time that I have the other foot on the path to something new and unknown. It's an important tactic that we all need to embrace IMHO.

The Path to Tomorrow Starts with Understanding Yesterday

I'm not trying to be all philosophical with saying that you can't understand tomorrow without understanding yesterday, but that is a very real issue that people can overlook. This comes in other ways that I like to phrase it:

- you can't automate what you don't understand
- process improvement implies you understand the process
- don't buy technology that is a "solution looking for a problem"

Don't even get me started on bimodal. Ok, I'll get started myself.

Welcome to Septimodal IT

Much of the punditry in our industry has landed on this concept of bimodal IT. What's frightening to me is that it's being treated as if it is new and that because it was given a name, that a consulting company is needed to help you understand it and get through it. We've been bimodal since the 1970s.

This is my picture of most IT shops in enterprise organizations:

1. Paper – don't knock it. More of your business is run here than you realize
2. Mainframe – centralized computing model with lots and lots of data
3. AS/400 and mid-tier computing – bridging the mainframe and the distributed platforms
4. Client/Server applications – common distributed systems architecture
5. Desktop-based – yes, MS Excel is keeping your finance department systems alive
6. Cloud-Native architectures – on-premises and cloud-hosted, but cloud-native architecture and design
7. SaaS-based – web and mobile access to SaaS platforms

When we roll one off of the bottom, it will inevitably be replaced by one at the top. Technically, there

are six forms of real IT-based content in the list, but I would rather not call it Sexamodal because that just sounds creepy.

Embrace Legacy and Nurture it’s Evolution

The more that we try to move forward, the more we tend to create abstractions to reduce the friction of interacting with the previous generations of IT systems. This is a great enabler for us to be able to keep the data and systems where they excel. Why should you move all of your data out of a distributed system into a web-based, cloud-native architecture when the cost to do so would far exceed the value gotten from the refactoring.

Make sure that you understand the real business requirements of the current systems before we race to replace them. Any decision around technology that is not made in the context of a business requirement will lead to costs and frustration. Plus, before we go around tagging everything as legacy as if it is a bad thing, remember that it is keeping your business alive.