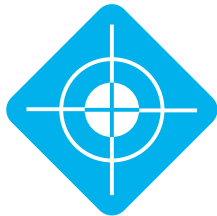# A YOUTHFUL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT ON IBM I

27 MARCH 2020 BY COMMON NORWAY

NICE is a specialized system based on the IBM i platform, managing one million customers for Fremtind insurance. The system is enhanced and maintained by a development department of more than 20 staff. As more and more developers reach retirement age, the IT department started recruiting young people - with surprisingly good results.

"Over the last few years, we have actively recruited four younger developers from different IT backgrounds. This has been beneficial for our department both professionally and socially, and has motivated us to go on attracting younger talent" says Nina Zahedi Meier, NICE Development Manager at Fremtind Forsikring.

Meier is responsible for NICE, a core insurance application based on IBM i, which Fremtind Insurance uses to manage more than one million customers.

"We considered changing the platform, but in January 2019 the respective insurance companies of SpareBank1 and DNB merged to form the new Fremtind company. It was at that point we decided to continue with the NICE system."

Stable platform

Fremtind Insurance are running IBM i 7.3 and 7.4 in the test environment. The company purchased the application source code from NICE in 1998 and have been enhancing it ever since.

"IBM i is a very stable, cost-effective and high-performance platform. After Evry signed a business partner agreement with IBM, it gave us better access to expertise from all over the world," explains Meier.

The Fremtind development team work in multidisciplinary teams including developers, testers, functional architects, system administrators, team leaders and Java developers. "We look at the whole stack, with the NICE system at the bottom and the Web applications on top. Some of our end-users have stayed on green screen, while others prefer a modern interface. It's kind of based on what they're used to". ◆

Nina Zahedi Meier is responsible for NICE application development at Fremtind Forsikring. The department actively recruited young developers to create a collaborative team environment of staff with complementary skills.

From z to i

Petter Aleksander Johansson was the first young developer that Meier recruited. He was familiar with IBM technology from his previous company, but not yet with IBM i.

"I was working on IBM z at the time and I developed a taste for developing on larger core applications. Before I read about the job opening at Fremtind, I hadn't heard of IBM i, but I figured it couldn't be that different from IBM z and could be exciting to learn. Fremtind was an attractive option with its large development department and mixed age range. The managers are good and Fremtind is clearly a company that prioritizes the IT side of the business. I was surprised with the IBM i platform, because the technology seemed much more modern and open than what I had used from IBM before. IBM i can run almost any language and framework along with the legacy application. This opens up plenty of opportunities for modernization, among many other things". Johansson informed his former colleague Anders Nesbakken about the opportunities at Fremtind.

"Petter wondered if I would be interested in a change. At the time I was working with Java and cloud-based solutions, and he thought that Free RPG was like Java. That's true for the most part, but some aspects of Free RPG were new to me. Luckily, we received good training and took several courses under the auspices of, among others, Common Norway and Common Sweden, says Nesbakken.

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Own development environment

With two new developers in place, a further two were recruited in 2019.

"I had taken a Bachelor's degree in Intelligent Systems at Kristiania University College when I applied to Fremtind. The first thing I was introduced to was 5250 screen emulation, but it didn't take long to get used to it and it was fast to learn," says Benjamin Borgen Ha.
Occasionally the team use 5250 screen emulation, commonly known as "green screen", but most of the time the graphical RDi development environment and modern ARCAD for DevOps solutions from ARCAD Software are used for development.

"We are used to running commands in Git, dos cmd and Windows Powershell, so we quickly got used to IBM i terminology. Since I started at Fremtind, the company has gone through a major transformation that has been incredibly exciting for all of us taking part. Internally our development team holds regular social events and I confirm that sharing skills is an important part of the culture of our organization," he adds.

Modern tools

In November of the same year, a fourth new staff member joined the team.

"When I heard about Fremtind, I was working as a data analyst, but in fact there was little analysis involved. With a Master's engineering degree in mathematics and physics, I was looking for other challenges, and I found them at Fremtind," explained Thor Olaf Klemsdal.

My typical day now includes RPG development using RDi and ARCAD for DevOps on IBM i, Jira and Confluence for projects, Humio for logging and Microsoft Teams for interaction.

"I like to work analytically, and getting things done is more analytical than managing large databases and making them work as efficiently as possible. I've worked a lot with Python and machine learning, so moving from machine learning to IBM i was quite a leap, but now it feels natural," he adds.

Busy days

A strong mix of age, gender and experience gave the development department a boost.

"The combination of young and old means that we get both a better working environment and a better social environment. At the moment, we are very occupied with all the system changes related to the merger, and there are many deadlines. Because of the coronavirus, we are working from home office trying to solve the tasks as best we can. When all the deals have been migrated, we will have 1.35 million customers, and we've scaled up for even more. Most importantly, it's good to have a stable platform, powerful tools and qualified people to manage all this," says Nina Zahedi Meier.

Nina Zahedi Meier

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