CICS Development Services Podcast

Nick: Hi, and welcome to another podcast from the "CICS software series". This is where we interview IBM CICS developers who can help you understand important IBM mainframe hardware and software issues. I'm your host Nick Garrod.

Nick: today we're going to talk about CICS Development services. Our guest speaker is Arndt Eade, Services Lead from the CICS Worldwide Development team in Hursley, UK. Hi Arndt, it's great to have you here.

Arndt: Thank you very much Nick, hello listeners.

Nick: Before we begin, I'd like to mention to our listeners that more information is available on our website and I'll be giving out details at the end of this podcast.

Nick: so Arndt, what exactly is CICS development services and why do we provide them.

Arndt: CICS development services is an offering provided by the CICS development organisation which is part of IBM z systems. We are a team of people based in the UK, China, India and the US and our aim is to provide technical expertise to CICS customers on a services basis.

Nick: What do you mean by "services basis"?

Arndt: Essentially it means that the customer pays for the support under a services contract.

Nick: Do we provide free support?

Arndt: Yes we do, there are a number of mechanisms by which customers can get non-charged support from IBM, but maybe that's a topic for another podcast!

Nick: Ok, I understand.

Nick: so what sort of support do you provide and how does it work?

Arndt: well, broadly speaking, we provide short duration technical expertise around the CICS Transaction server portfolio.

Nick: OK, can you elaborate on short duration?

Arndt: Typically 2-3 week engagements although we have been known to get involved in longer term, up to months or even longer part time support which customers can call upon as and when they need.

Nick: I understand. And when you say the CICS portfolio, what does that cover?

Arndt: All supported versions of CICS Transaction server, CICS Transaction Gateway and TXSeries. Plus the CICS tools portfolio made up of the CICS Explorer, CICS IA, PA, DA, CM, VR and VT – (uses as well).

Nick: that's great. So what sort of technical support do customers typically ask for?

Arndt: It very varied but over the years some common themes have emerged, so much so that we've actually packaged them up into offering.

Nick: Interesting, can you briefly run through them?

Arndt: Of course, so we start with a CICS health check which is a top down analysis of a customer's CICS infrastructure; we then have performance optimisation which as the name suggests in an analysis of one or more customer CICS regions to identify issues and provide recommendations for improvement in performance and throughput; We have upgrade assistance which is aimed at helping customers who are looking to upgrade to newer versions of CICS; we provide support for security and governance, an area that is often overlooked but is aimed at ensuring customer CICS regions are meeting the organisations security needs; We also provide assistance for customer looking to exploit newer mechanisms for getting work into CICS – such as web services, connectivity via WebSphere MQ, WAS-WOLA, CICS transaction Gateway and Communications server IP sockets – and of course mobile devices. Customer will also ask us to assist them to exploit some of the new technologies that are continually being evolved and enhanced in CICS – such as events, introduced in Version 4, or in V5 first class applications, platforms and policies, development of rich front end applications using Servlets and JSPs within WebSphere liberty profile which runs standalone within a CICS JVM Server.

Nick: Wow, that's a fair amount.

Arndt: Yes it is, but if it's not covered by what I just mentioned we're more than happy to work with the customer to put together a customized offering.

Nick: Even better.

Nick: It's interesting that you mentioned some of the newer technologies. What happens if customers need help getting going?

Arndt: That's a great question Nick. Well, in additional to formal education offerings provided by IBM and our business partners we do find ourselves being asked to provide bespoke CICS education, which is typically informal but tailored to the customer's environment and specific needs.

Nick: excellent. Where does that take place?

Arndt: Normally on-site, which is the case for most of the activities I just mentioned although for some, such as the health checks and performance optimisation engagements we can do quite a bit remotely.

Nick: Fantastic. But just going back to the education subject. How does that work if I wanted to learn about something that perhaps covers a number of areas – such as Mobile or cloud. Can you help with that?

Arndt: Another great question Nick! Yes we can. We realised a while back that there are some areas where we need to explain the concepts as well as the technical detail, along with its relevance to the customer's current environment. To meet that requirement we put together a series of workshops, which are a little more hands-on than just education.

Nick: sounds interesting, can you tell us a bit more.

Arndt: Sure, so we start as you mentioned with Mobile and cloud. We explain the concepts, how the CICS portfolio fits into those concepts and then work with the customer so that they can move from where they are now to some form of implementation. We've also, had requests for workshops around CICS High Availability, CICS Upgrade and CICS performance, plus a CICS specific look at how Java has evolved and works in the CICS environment.

Nick: so, in version 5 we enhanced the product under a number of themes: operational efficiency, Service agility and cloud enablement. How does Development Services cater for customers who are interested in exploring these?

Arndt: Well, we've talked about the cloud and mobile workshops already, but if you look at operational efficiency – this theme is about optimizing and automating your CICS environment, areas which are covered by CICS performance optimization and systems management offerings. Likewise, service agility is speeding up the development lifecycle and integration of applications in the mobile world; again an area which is addressed through existing offerings or workshops.

Nick: Thanks Arndt. So let's say I'm a customer looking to get some assistance. How do they get in touch?

Arndt: Well they can drop us an email at CICSDTS@UK.IBM.COM and someone will be in touch. Or you can talk to your account team or local IBM ISSW software services manager and they'll get things moving.

Nick: From anywhere in the world?

Arndt: Yes, we have done engagements literally all over the world – although I'm still looking forward to one in the Maldives.

Nick: thanks Arndt. Well I think that's provided us with a pretty comprehensive understanding of what customers can expect from CICS Development services. So if you need some help – It's simply a case of getting in touch!

Nick: Well that wraps up this podcast discussion. Before we go I just wanted to provide you with some useful links to CICS Development Services and other podcasts in the series.

Nick: For an overview of the CICS development services offerings visit WWW.IBM.COM/CICS and select the 'services' tab. Alternatively you can email CICSDTS@UK.IBM.COM and we'll send you some additional softcopy information.

Nick: for other podcasts in the service visit http://www.ibm.com/software/os/systemz/podcasts/websphereonz/ and if you're interested in video presentation on CICS technical themes check out channel https://www.youtube.com/user/CICSfluff on YouTube

Join us next time as we talk about another important mainframe topic. For now, this is Nick Garrod saying "thank you for listening"