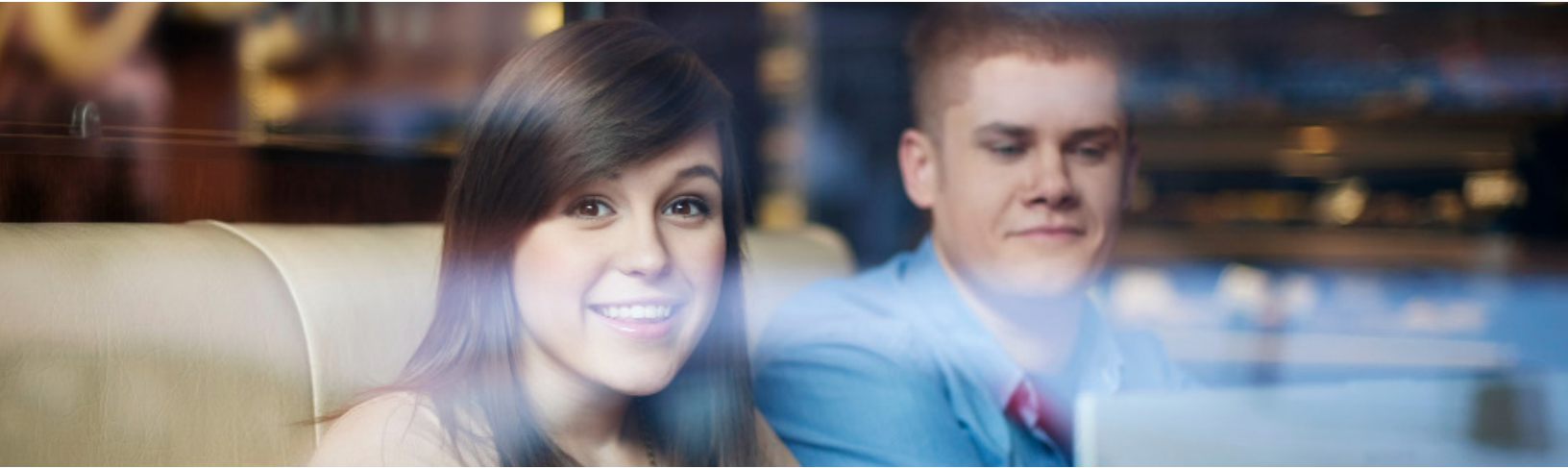


HIGH AVAILABILITY IS A FAMILY AFFAIR AT BDK



Choosing the right business partner is a critical decision for IBM i customers. While some companies may be swayed by partners with impressive office spaces, certifications, and polished presentations, BDK Inc., (BDK) a Maryland-based consulting firm founded by Bruce and Edwina Kimball, offers a distinctive approach. BDK combines deep technical expertise with a family-oriented, customer-centered philosophy.

Though not all of the Kimball family is involved in the business, enough are to instill a familial atmosphere at the 40-person company, headquartered in Easton, Maryland. Bruce Kimball's career in IBM's midrange began in the late 1970s, and he honed his skills across the System/34, System/36, and System/38 before becoming an advisory systems engineer at IBM. In 1999, Kimball founded BDK, with a commitment to providing a highly reliable, personalized service for AS/400 customers.

Over time, BDK has diversified its services, expanding beyond hardware and programming to include hosting for IBM Power and Intel servers at data centers around the country, support for LANSA, a modernization tool for IBM i and ERP systems, VoIP solutions, analytics implementation, and EDI support on IBM i. This flexibility has been intentional.

“If someone only has one tool (like a hammer), they will try to use it to solve every problem—even if it’s not the best solution,” Kimball states. “We wanted to avoid dependency on any single service, given the fast-changing landscape of the industry.”

BDK's robust high-availability (HA) offerings protect critical customer operations. Initially, BDK relied on HA software for data replication between its primary center in Reston, Virginia, and its backup in Denver, Colorado. However, following an acquisition that affected support quality, the Kimballs sought a new HA partner. They were introduced to Maxava, whose team left a strong impression due to their technical expertise and customer-centric approach.

The meeting left a positive impression on Bruce and Edwina Kimball. “We worked with the Maxava technical team,” Edwina Kimball said. “They’re really smart, really good.”

Maxava's solution, Maxava HA, offered BDK a unique advantage through comprehensive replication capabilities that included not only replication of data and IFS, but also essential system elements like user profiles and configurations. As Bruce Kimball notes, “Maxava goes a bit further by identifying and replicating elements you can't afford to miss for a failover.”

Additionally, Maxava provides interfaces suited to a range of users, including a traditional 5250 screen for IBM i veterans and a web-based GUI, Mi8, for modern monitoring and management. The diversity of user interfaces is a plus for Bruce Kimball.

“They’ve got a green screen interface, which old guys like me like to use, but they also have a couple of graphical tools there,” he said. “Mi8 allows you to use a browser to really look at what’s going on and monitor and manage the system. Younger people prefer that type of an interface.”

Another attribute of Maxava's business model that BDK appreciates is the importance that it places on practicing role swaps. “If you don't test your DR, you don't have DR,” Edwina Kimball said.

Maxava encourages its customers to perform a simulated role swap, or SRS, on a regular basis so that customers are confident that they will be able to do so in an emergency. During an SRS, the transactions from the production system will build up on the secondary system, which holds off applying them so that the system can be tested.

It's impressive to watch Maxava HA apply those transactions once the SRS has been completed. Edwina Kimball says. “What's kind of surprising to me is it doesn't take long to catch back up,” she says. “It's really fast.”

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With its various data centers and managed server business, BDK is in a good position to offer a fully managed high availability solution. Instead of buying an entire IBM Power machine, customers can essentially rent an LPAR from BDK and replicate their production data into one of BDK's Power servers.

While high availability is more common than it used to be, there are many IBM i shops that have still not made the jump to HA. Bruce Kimball hopes that the combination of hosted LPARs, Maxava HA, and professional monitoring from his technicians will help them to see the business continuity light.

"The bigger guys understand," Bruce Kimball said. "The question you ask them is, well, if you're down, what happens to your business? And how long can you be down before your business is severely impacted? Sometimes they say, 'We can do without it for a couple of days.' Maybe that's not an HA opportunity. But if another one says 'I can't ship product without that machine running. If I can't ship, I'm not making money,' that's a different thing."

As BDK and Maxava continue to build their partnership, BDK has grown to appreciate Maxava's reliable support and commitment to customer service—an essential quality for a family-oriented company like BDK. Edwina Kimball summed it up best: "Maxava has been an outstanding partner, responsive and supportive when we need them, which is crucial to our business."