

IBM i in 2025: Early Career Reflections

As a new computer science graduate, I didn't expect to work with IBM i. I assumed I would be building cloud-native applications, working with modern JavaScript frameworks, or experimenting with AI tools. Instead, during my Software Engineer Co-op at EllisDon, I was introduced to IBM i, working with CL, RPG, and SYNON, and it honestly changed how I view enterprise systems.

At Western University, we usually build systems from scratch. We design the architecture, choose the stack, and deploy something new; In industry, it's different. You inherit systems that already run the business. At EllisDon, I saw how IBM i supports financial and operational workflows that people rely on every single day, accounting processes, reporting systems, and internal tools that keep projects moving. This system is stable, deeply integrated with the company's processes, and business-critical. It's not a side project. It's core infrastructure.

Before this experience, I saw "legacy" as outdated. Now I see it as proven. Legacy systems often survive because they are reliable and deeply tied to business logic that has evolved over years. Rewriting a core financial system is not just a technical challenge, it's expensive, time-consuming, and introduces serious operational risk. That's one reason IBM i continues to be used in banks, construction firms, and other large enterprises. It works, and stability matters more than trendiness.

What stands out to me is not the age of the platform, but its role within the architecture. IBM i is often the backbone, handling transactions, storing structured data, running core programs. Around it, companies build APIs, modern backend services, and sometimes cloud integrations to extend functionality. The outer layers can evolve, but the core remains steady. It doesn't need to be flashy. It needs to be reliable.

Working with IBM i early in my career gave me a more realistic understanding of how enterprise systems operate. In school, we focus on speed and innovation. In business, the priority is continuity and risk management. Technology trends move fast. Businesses move carefully. Both perspectives are important.

IBM i may not get attention in tech headlines, but it continues to play a meaningful role in large organizations. I'm glad I had the chance to work with it early on, it gave me a better foundation for understanding how real-world systems are built and maintained.

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