

# The Smith Group

## Filling the Mainframe Skills GAP

Most companies do not call The Smith Group because they want a broad modernization lecture. They call because something in their mainframe environment has become urgent.

A systems programmer with 40 years of experience gives notice. An application developer who understands decades of COBOL logic is retiring. They know which job scheduler calls which program, which flat files feed downstream systems and why a piece of logic was written a certain way years ago. When they walk out, that environmental knowledge walks out with them.

This is not a future problem; it is happening now across nearly every industry that runs on mainframe infrastructure. COBOL systems process an estimated \$3 trillion in commerce every day, yet the average developer is 55 years old and roughly 10 percent retire every year. Few people are coming behind them.

Lane Smith, founder and CEO of The Smith Group, spent 14 years at BMC Software and a decade at IBM, long enough to know which boutique specialty shops do the best mainframe work and why most modern IT leaders have never heard of them.

“These providers have been doing great work for decades, but they don’t advertise,” says Smith. “Most IT executives have no clue who they are. Knowing who they are is what we bring to the table.”

The Smith Group connects enterprises with that network of niche providers, senior specialists and purpose-built tools. It carries no bench overhead and scales around whatever the engagement requires.

### STAFF AUGMENTATION BUILT AROUND THE REAL PROBLEM

When 30 to 40 years of experience leave the building, there is no traditional replacement. The mainframe industry was warned time and time again that this would happen, but no pipeline of emerging talent was groomed. But there are pools of free agents that can bring the same experience level and fresh ideas from working at multiple industrial-strength mainframe shops if you know where to look for them...and The Smith Group does.

Over his decades of work in the space

and his 9 years as a business owner, Mr. Smith has cultivated a large network not only of mainframe specialty service shops but also of tenured mainframe specialists available at a moment’s notice. Give them a job description and within 72 business hours, The Smith Group will deliver two or three candidates with 25-plus years of experience, ready to go.

### A REAL LIVE EXAMPLE

A large retailer wanted to replace its enterprise-wide middleware vendor prior to a significant renewal payment due. In the final 90 days, the project stalled after it was discovered that the middleware was connected to Remedy via a complex web of Assembler programs. While they were once considered an assembler-pioneering shop, they now have no Assemble expertise remaining. The Smith Group knew where to find that skillset. But more than Assembler expertise was required. An Assembler knowledgeable systems programmer was required to locate, identify and isolate the offending code. And that is precisely what The Smith Group provided: one person with both an Assembler and a Systems Programmer skill set and the job was completed days before the cutover. Without the fix, every IT change would have gone manual, creating an overwhelming workload for the team environment. It had no assembler programmers left. The Smith Group deployed a specialist with expertise in z/OS systems programming and assembler. They completed the work days before the cutover.

### TURNING TRIBAL KNOWLEDGE INTO DIGITAL ACCESS

Replacing a skill set is only part of the problem. That is when discovery begins and if the knowledge base is gone, discovery is the challenge. Systems modified over four decades by different technicians accumulate dependencies that exist nowhere except in the memory of the people who built them. APIs, web services, schedulers, databases and distributed infrastructure are all connected, yet almost none of it is documented in a usable way.

The Smith Group partners with RES IT, whose Docet EV software-as-a-service maps application objects (jobs, programs, transactions, schedules, files, databases, ...) into a centralized repository that teams can interrogate and in which AI can be effectively deployed. The goal is to create institutional knowledge that remains accessible after the people who held it are gone.

### MAKING COBOL LOGIC EASIER TO FOLLOW

Another Smith Group partner, Phase Change’s COBOL Colleague, addresses the code itself. Go-to statements scatter logic across programs, creating spaghetti you would never want to eat and delaying modernization projects by weeks, months or even years. COBOL Colleague uses AI to reorganize that logic sequentially and surface the business logic that developers need, stripping away decades of accumulated noise. What might take months to decode becomes a searchable, usable repository and modernization projects that once stalled due to comprehension issues can move forward.

Lane Smith,  
Founder and CEO

# Certificate



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