



## Utility Supply Company Digs Deep to Improve ERP Performance

### **Client**

Mainline Supply Company  
[www.mainlinesupply.net](http://www.mainlinesupply.net)

### **Industry**

Distributor of underground utility products

### **Challenge**

Mainline had implemented Mincron Software Systems' HDX distribution software solution on four servers based on the Intel® Architecture, but wasn't getting the performance and reliability that they required from the x86 platform.

### **Solution**

A single IBM System i™ model 520 Enterprise Edition server with 4GB of memory, and 456GB of usable disk space in a RAID5 configuration. Upgrade options within the model line provide nearly six times the initial processing power, plus 32GB of memory and support for up to 39TB of disk space, allowing for exceptional scalability to accommodate future growth.



Mainline Supply Company, based in Charlotte, NC, is a leading regional distributor of underground utility products to both the public and private sectors. Since its founding in 1997, Mainline's IT infrastructure—like its business—has grown rapidly. By 2001, the company had six offices each with its own server, but the time and cost required to manage their growing resources led them to consolidate their servers at a single co-location facility in nearby Greensboro.

In July, 2004, when Mainline was a nine-branch operation with 100 licensed system users, the company decided to standardize all their business processes on enterprise applications from Mincron Software Systems. Mincron has been providing best-of-breed enterprise resource planning (ERP) solutions for plumbing, HVAC, water works, building materials and industrial distributors for more than 25 years. Their distribution and warehousing suites provide integrated applications to cover virtually every aspect of their clients' businesses, from ordering and inventory management to operations, accounting and shipping.

In July of 2005, Mainline deployed Mincron's HDX Distribution Software product on four servers based on the Intel Architecture and running the Windows® operating environment. By May, 2006, as a result of organic growth and an acquisition, Mainline's revenue had almost doubled. The company was operating 15 branches with licenses for 150 Mincron® software users, and needed a server environment that would more easily scale to meet their growth without added complexity or performance limitations.



## Key Benefits

- Client replaced four servers with a single IBM System i model 520 midrange server
- IT staffing resources were reduced from four to two, despite a 50 percent increase in branches supported
- End-of-month reporting has been reduced from two nights to less than two hours
- Performance has improved dramatically, and system downtime has been all but eliminated

## Why Sirius Computer Solutions

Mincron suggested that Mainline engage business partner Sirius because of their extensive experience implementing Mincron software on IBM midrange servers. Sirius thoroughly evaluated Mainline's situation and recommended a hardware configuration that would let them get the most out of their software investment, while providing the availability and scalability that Mainline required.

## Products

- One IBM System i model 520 server

Despite their satisfaction with the functionality of the Mincron applications, the performance they were seeing was far below what they had been expecting, and reliability was a problem. One dedicated IT staff worked full-time just on monitoring and load-balancing the applications, so the servers wouldn't slow down unacceptably or crash altogether. And with even more growth ahead, Mainline had serious doubts about their servers' ability to keep up.

When the identified growth solution for running Mincron on Intel Architecture-based servers became multiple machines, with separate tiers for the applications, database and Web servers—plus a failover server to provide the level of application availability that Mainline demanded—Mincron recommended that Mainline engage the infrastructure experts from Sirius to help them review their options.

Sirius is a Mincron business partner and the world's top seller of IBM System i solutions, so the company has extensive experience implementing Mincron solutions on System i servers. According to Read Boles, Chief Operating Officer of Mincron Software Systems, it was easy to recommend both System i and Sirius. "Mainline made it clear that they needed a platform that would provide the highest possible stability, performance and scalability for our applications. And our relationship with Sirius, along with their unbeatable experience with System i, made them the ideal resource for Mainline's platform migration."

After thoroughly evaluating Mainline's infrastructure and performance goals, Sirius surprised Mainline by recommending that all their ERP hosting needs could be met easily with a single IBM System i server, which is the platform of choice for more than 90 percent of Mincron customers.

Still, migration was a troubling thought for Ben Cagle, Mainline's Director of Operations. In order to handle the number of transactions being processed by the Mincron applications, they had recently added two brand-new x86 servers to the two they already had, and he thought it was a big mistake to change to a platform with which he'd had no experience.

Fortunately, Cagle had recently added System i expertise to his team, when he hired Tami Mech as his IS Manager. Mech had extensive experience working with IBM AS/400® and iSeries™ servers from her previous position, and knew that the platform's reliability, scalability and performance would more than offset the cost of switching platforms. And based on that experience, Mech endorsed the technology aspects of the System i server environment, and Cagle agreed to compare the costs and benefits of migration against the continued use of the servers that they'd installed just a year earlier.





### **Painless, plug-and-play migration**

Sirius configured the new System i server and shipped it directly to Mincron to have its Hardgoods Distribution® software pre-loaded. The Hardgoods Distribution solution offers the same functionality of Mainline's original HDX solution, but is written in RPG and runs exclusively on IBM System i servers running the i5/OS® operating system, for maximum performance and reliability.

Once the server arrived at Mainline's hosted location, it was literally plug-and-play. And no one was more surprised by the increase in performance and reliability—or of the ease of migrating to the new platform—than Ben Cagle. “The day we switched over was the most uneventful day in my computer life. Our users didn't notice a thing, except that everything was running precisely as it should. The applications were fast, always available, and 100 percent reliable.”

Now only two people manage the entire organization's IT needs, despite the fact that Mainline recently grew to 18 branches. And the company is anticipating even more dramatic growth in the near future; through expansion and acquisition, they expect to have roughly 35 offices open by the end of 2007. But even this dramatic growth won't force them to add another server. And the IT department is now operating smoothly, with half the staff it had a year ago.

### **All they need now, and plenty of room to grow**

For now, the only investment planned for the datacenter is a new, automated tape library for backup and archiving. According to IS Manager Mech, “All administration is handled remotely from our offices. The only thing that has to be done on location is swapping tape for backup. And when we install our LTO, we won't even have to do that!”

And when the time comes to increase their server's capacity, there's plenty of room for growth without adding any more machines. “Through processor, RAM and disk upgrades, our one System i will be able to handle five times the workload we currently have. And it's been rock-solid since we turned it on.”

*“I'll admit it – I used to be a Wintel bigot. I thought that switching to IBM midrange servers would be like going back to the dark ages. But now that I've seen the performance and reliability first-hand, I'm a big IBM fan!”*

*– Ben Cagle  
Director of Operations  
Mainline Supply Company*



### For more information

To learn more about reliable, scalable System i solutions for your business computing needs, please contact your Sirius account executive, or visit [www.siriuscom.com](http://www.siriuscom.com)

### About the companies

**IBM**  
[ibm.com](http://ibm.com)

**Mincron Software Systems**  
[mincron.com](http://mincron.com)

**Mainline Supply Company**  
[mainlinesupply.net](http://mainlinesupply.net)

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