

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In 2009, we've witnessed a landmark, historic event with the election of the first African-American president of the U.S., Barack Obama. On the very day his hand rested on Lincoln's Bible, years of division and prejudice were transcended by his remarkable achievement. Perhaps we've finally learned that bigotry and racism have

no place in our lives and only serve to make us less than we can be. By choosing to allow any type of difference to keep us from understanding and appreciating the unique gifts everyone has to offer, we miss out on the wisdom of tolerance and acceptance.

But bigotry is very much alive and well in our business. Ever since the all-out assault from the "client/server/open systems" market players in the early '90s, mainframers have united to form a distinct us vs. them mentality. I've watched this division both literally and figuratively erect walls within companies, where it has become a heavyweight-caliber bout of the "mainframe" against the "network." This leads to closed-door scheming where both groups plan to grab as much of the IT budget as possible, with no appreciation or support of the other. Of course, neither understands the other, and only sees the differences as a threat. This sounds familiar, and portends the same dysfunctional and anti-social result as human bigotry.

It's time to stop this parochial separation. Recently, both Microsoft and HP have begun overtures to the mainframe marketplace; Microsoft through its Mainframe Modernization program and HP through its Mainframe Alternatives offering. Why, they even had the audacity to use the *z/Journal* and *Mainframe Executive* advertising programs to reach out to the customer base. How dare they! Has publisher Bob Thomas lost his mind? These are the types of emails I received directly from anguished customers in response, wondering why Thomas Communications would even allow it to happen.

Thomas' answer is simple, and dead-on correct. His company's job is to publish information and content that's relevant and appropriate to the readers of its publications. And in today's rainbow-coalition world of computing, Microsoft and HP both represent tangible, legitimate options, in part or full, to the installed base of mainframe customers. Particularly in the lower-end small- and medium-size business markets, where options are much fewer and new capital expenditures are shifting

to other workloads, customers need to know what's available.

This bigotry and division are driven by one fundamental principle—fear. And while many would say it's the fear that the "workload will never be accomplished" or the "cost to the company will skyrocket," I can actually distill it down to a different emotion, one that's very easy to understand: self-preservation. The objectors are concerned about their jobs—about losing their personal relevance to the organization!

So, what if the divide could be bridged? What if we could find a way for existing mainframers who are planning to retire in the next few years to impart the wisdom that comes from operating the legacy of a system for decades to the next generation? What if the young upstarters could really learn to appreciate an overnight batch update cycle and the importance of managing uptime for your transaction processing system? In short, what if we could all just get along?

The prejudice must end. We've seen this tear staffs apart to the point they no longer speak. One CIO at a prominent customer fired his mainframe IT manager simply because he could no longer tolerate the manager's constant efforts to champion only the mainframe's causes. It was about business value, not CPU value, and the staff just couldn't function. IT executives need to first be allowed to fully understand and then challenge what Microsoft, HP, or any other platform or provider has to offer. If the value is real and demonstrable, it will stand up under scrutiny. If not, who better to see through it than those who've run their businesses for decades with the original enterprise computing? But for that we need open minds, not just open source.

Let's celebrate our differences and end the desire to isolate and alienate the computing platforms that don't look or sound like "us." At the end of the day, we're all storing, processing, and serving information to our users, and everyone has something good and valuable to offer.

To the question, "Can a mainframer actually change?" I answer, "Yes, we can."

That Sums it up. **ME**

A Time
for
Change

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