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Here in Dallas, dot-com wunderkind-cum-billionaire-cum-pro-basketball owner Mark Cuban is really enjoying himself. He took his unbridled passion for Indiana basketball and decided that he just had to be able to listen to the Indiana games live here in Texas. That passion turned into the founding of the company Broadcast.

com and developed the technology to allow radio and other live audio to be broadcast over the Internet. A few years later, Yahoo decided they couldn't live without that technology and paid more than \$6 billion for the company. Cuban only pocketed about \$1.6 billion, but that allowed him to focus on what he really loved. He bought Dallas' pro-basketball team, the Dallas Mavericks.

Basketball was Cuban's passion, and he was willing to do whatever it took to make the team successful. He still sits in the same seats he held as a fan. He's at every game, usually dressed in his trademark jeans and T-shirt, leading the cheers like the most enthusiastic of fans. Cuban has made sure his basketball players are coddled by outfitting them with their own Boeing 757 for travel, upgraded hotels, and a locker room complete with a home-entertainment system in each locker. If you go to the Dallas Mavericks' offices, you will find an array of cubicles for everyone, with Cuban in the first cube as you walk in the door. Staffers will quickly offer you a soda, ice cream—whatever you like. You instantly get the idea that this is no ordinary billionaire, no ordinary professional team owner.

And it works because of passion. Parked right outside the Mavericks' office is Cuban's new Lexus—with his personalized license plate that reads: "MFFL"—Mavs Fan For Life, the name of the official fan club.

With the backdrop of this kind of zealous passion and pursuit of success, it makes you wonder; has the industrial strength and continued stamina of mainframe computers, which have withstood all the industry challenges, in effect created a similar fan club? MFFL—MainFrames For Life?

Consider the storied "plight" of the mainframe. Developed as the first commercial-class computer for all the world more than 45 years ago, the mainframe has alternated as savior and evil-doer for many of the last 15 years. While the mainframe powered nearly all organizations' computing resources up until the early '90s, the birth of the client/server craze seemed to spell their demise. Mainframes were old. Mainframes were expensive. Mainframes were toast.

The bevy of vendors from database to hardware manufacturers rushed to show the world they could do it faster, better, and cheaper than anything that had come

before. Many companies believed it to be true and immediately launched their \$20 million, "inexpensive" conversion to be done in six to 12 months. As the story has been well-written, three years and many extra millions of dollars later, many found this simple plug-pull conversion to be anything but. Many companies lost production and profits. Others lost face.

When the Year 2000 challenge arose as the paramount focus of ITers worldwide, we were able to take an unusual inventory. Interesting statistics were revealed; "trillions" of lines of COBOL code had been written. More than 70 percent of the world's data still resided on mainframes. All this data flew in the face of the rash of highly publicized conversions to anything non-mainframe. It seemed the mainframe had been more of a cornerstone than many had realized.

Now the mainframe has been taken seriously across all computing platforms as the harbinger of serious, business-ready computing. On its Website, Intel Corp. describes its server platforms as having a range "... from dual-processor systems to mainframe-class platforms." Microsoft announces on its Website a partnership: "Fujitsu and Microsoft to Deliver Mainframe-Class Capability." In fact, search for the term "mainframe-class" on nearly all serious, mainframe-competitive Websites and you'll be amazed when you see the need to measure up. Suddenly, the mainframe has become the benchmark by which all others compare and contrast their solutions.

Where does the mainframe go from here? There is a bright future as integration and rejuvenation technologies continue to build important bridges between the attributes of the mainframe-class and emerging technologies. The mainframe's interfaces of antiquity are being replaced with robust, Web-based interfaces as a standard. Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA) strategies, including important eXtensible Markup Language (XML) and Web Services capabilities, are delivering for data and applications what TCP/IP brought in connectivity. While new and additional platforms will continue to integrate across the computing landscape, the mainframe's role as a mainstay will continue to anchor information technology.

Mark Cuban had many good ideas—and we'll have to borrow this one from him as we officially name the de facto fan club—MainFrames For Life!

That Sums It Up. **ME**

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