

z/Bottom Line



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Family Values

In this world of hyperconnectivity, exposure, and overabundance of activities and options available for today's youth, there's a great deal of concern about the family structure and potential lack thereof. For family to remain relevant in their lives, it comes down to core values including reliability, trust, performance, and undying loyalty. These principles are the foundation upon which children can always return, no matter where their attention has been diverted to the latest trend, fad, or temptation.

In our profession, our "family" is comprised of the community of people who make up our industry; in many ways inter-related and dependent upon each other. It's amazing to see the same ideals are what keep the mainframe community relevant throughout the data processing ages, despite all the distractions, trends, and temptations.

IBM mainframe-based computing remains ingrained within the infrastructure of a majority of the world's largest and most critical organizations. And it's precisely the same core family values that makes that true. Despite the continued challenge of many that the only solution for new IT direction is aimed at a separate platform, IBM has earned the family's trust with more than five decades of proving that vital systems can be steadfast. But this trust hasn't been built simply upon a historical legacy of success, as many people assume. Rather, it is the rapidly evolving complement of technology, value, and performance that keep the mainframe pertinent.

So, where's the proof of IBM's loyalty to a customer base well into its fifth decade? In addition to remaining true to the well-conceived original design that was the sole computing architecture crafted for commercial processing use (described by one long-time IBMer as the "well-balanced cube" of I/O, CPU, memory, and storage), IBM has improved its bottom-line value in exponential ways, just in the current decade alone.

Last year's announcements of the z9 EC and BC generation of hardware provided an unmatched level of scalability. Capacities now have an astounding range from 26 to 17,800 MIPS, all built upon the same technological footprint, allowing for "in-flight" capacity adjustments to meet demand. From a cost/value measurement, the equivalent-size z9 BC's announced price was a reduction of nearly 50 percent over its immediate predecessor, the z890. For organizations needing to explore Linux in their environment, dedicated LPARs in the z9s (Integrated Linux Facilities [ILFs]) dropped in price by almost 25 percent. IBM also has provided a myriad of ways to offload eclectic processing to specialized CPUs, meaning the core CPU capacity isn't affected by these special needs (e.g., cryptographic, Java, OSA, and most recently, XML processing), further enhancing performance pricing.

These were just recent steps in the hardware offerings. But the bane of the mainframe from comparative discussions has long been software cost, but IBM has made substantial strides. This multi-billion dollar behemoth, which accrues billions each year in mainframe revenue, actually took a pay cut. With the introduction of a variety of measured workload-based pricing plans (generically Workload License Charges [WLC]), customers may now pay only for the portion of the system they are using. And the MWLC models included holding the line on pricing so a customer at full capacity pricing today wouldn't experience an increase, only a potential decrease. To IBM's enduring credit of taking care of VSE users, this new pricing model has recently been expanded to include z/VSE, as announced earlier this year. To look at just an entry-level scenario that seems almost surreal, a customer could actually buy a 240 MIPS processor with extra capacity for seasonal or emergency needs, but still pay for as few as 20 MIPS in software cost according to their usage.

So enduring value, both from a foundational standpoint as well as continued care and feeding, is why the mainframe continues to be relevant. While writing this column, I spoke with an executive of a large, international financial organization. He told me a tale, which, given the company's size and prominence, was almost beyond belief. One part of the world provides their services through a mainframe-based system as it has for decades. A second part of the world provides exactly the same services, except using Unix/open systems configurations. This organization is disappointed when they "drop down" to the nearly impossible five 9s (99.999) of availability, as they are usually at 100 percent. They recently experienced a full system outage in their open systems environment of nearly four solid hours where customers were completely cut off from usage. The failure happened as part of an application roll-out, and the systems were literally intractably frozen. Post mortems continue, but the executive said, "This next week, there could be discussions about why all of our centers aren't using the mainframe-based system. In light of this, no one will care about the religious beliefs that led us to the open systems version."

Family values: trust, reliability, and predictable and repeat performance. Just as we know in our own family lives, these values can prevent dysfunction and breakdown.

And that's z/Bottom Line. **Z**

About the Author

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