

# z/Bottom Line



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## z/VSE: What's in a Name?

Here's an easy one: What do Nebraska, Dumbo, and IBM all have in common?

They're all known for their big ears, of course!

It's a "corny" (my apologies) reference to an elephant, admittedly, but the most important of this triumvirate is the reference to the behemoth's ability to listen. IBM's preview on April 7, 2004 of z/VSE reflected its desire to more closely align its mainframe software offerings, but more importantly, its capacity to listen—to the marketplace, its own internal champions, and most essentially, its loyal customer set.

To appreciate the magnitude of the victory for the unyielding dedicated customer base that comprises the users of the VSE operating system, you must appreciate their historical plight.

When the operating system bearing the moniker "DOS" entered the lexicon, the Mustang and the Beatles also were all the rage. IBM originally introduced the "Disk Operating System" shortly after the birth of the revolutionary announcement of the S/360 line of computers. The announcement was a transcendental moment for IBM, as it shed its menagerie of dissimilar computer offerings and announced a "family" of upwardly compatible models.

The S/360 derived its name from the 360 degrees on the compass—meeting all needs in all locations. Quite clever, indeed. Apparently, all the marketing energy had been used up by the time IBM decided to name the operating system for the newly announced hardware, the stunningly creative "OS," or "Operating System." But beyond the uninspired name, OS had one other problem: It simply would not fit in the memory of the smallest 360 computers. So, the creative engineers crafted a subset of functions from OS that would fit. DOS was born.

Over the next four decades, as the S/360 hardware evolved to the S/370, 43xx, 308x, 3090, 9370, Multiprise, and now the zSeries brand of processors, the operating systems kept pace with innovation. Although one by design, and the other by default, OS became OS/MFT, OS/MVT, MVS, MVS/XA, MVS/ESA, OS/390 and the latest iteration delivered concurrent with the zSeries hardware announcement, z/OS (back to that inspired OS again!).

DOS also created offspring, although nearly all follow-on releases were regarded more as bastard children. DOS begat DOS/VS, DOS/VSE, VSE/AF, VSE/SP, and then VSE/ESA. At nearly every step of its maturation, DOS faced some force within IBM that was determined to "sunset" its life on the computing planet. There were overt efforts, such as the VSE-to-MVS conversion task force chartered by the

now-extinct GUIDE organization. And there was the famous speech in 1989 when Dr. Ed Altman stood in front of the VSE faithful and nearly shouted, "You will *never* see VSE/XA." It turns out Dr. E. was right about that. VSE skipped XA for the more robust ESA enhancements.

What happened over those 40 years while IBM was planning to unify its mainframe operating systems? Thousands of users around the world happened. Shops that found they could do more but spend less continued to insist they would ignore IBM's apparent attitude of, "You will go to MVS or you will go to hell!" Most VSE users asked, "What's the difference?"

While it's true that many VSE users represent the smaller end of the mainframe spectrum, there are a large number who don't fit this mold. One such customer in New York just upgraded its 383 MIP CPU running native VSE/ESA to a 660 MIP CPU, and will remain native VSE.

The outcry of the faithful and the demand for innovation finally won IBM over. Big Blue's ears listened to the customer base. In 1990, IBM publicly declared it had made a mistake, and there would be no further overt efforts to force customers where they didn't want to go. Following this admission with dramatic innovation embodied in VSE/ESA, IBM was true to its word.

So, when the zSeries processors, z/OS and z/VM were announced in 2000, the omission of a z/VSE announcement was unsettling to the thousands of VSE users around the world. Seems IBM was stuck on a technical detail that "z" had to mean support for 64-bit hardware architecture. Once they realized (and their battalion of attorneys consented) that VSE users at the moment have no need for such support (in fact, few z/OS users have even implemented 64-bit), IBM was able to reposition VSE into the strategic fold of the "z" line of products.

The importance of the name couldn't be more meaningful to the thousands of VSE/ESA users worldwide. It represents a statement by IBM that it's still listening and may have finally, officially adopted VSE as a member of the family.

So welcome to z/Family, z/VSE.

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

### About the Author

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