z/Bottom Line

Nothing to Emulate

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It's been said that "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." But IBM must not be feeling the adulation.

As chronicled before in this space, the technologists at Fundamental Software, Inc. (FunSoft) created a wondrous piece of software, Flex-ES, and additional technology that delivered true, compatible emulation of mainframe CPU architecture in an Intel environment. In use by hundreds of customers throughout the world, Flex-ES literally saved the low-end of mainframe computing from migration to other platforms. There's no other objective way to view it. Perhaps even more importantly, FunSoft's technology segued into a cost-effective method for software developers to acquire systems to create new solutions under IBM's PartnerWorld for Developers (PWD) program.

But for the past two years, issues have arisen in this erstwhile happy scenario that have since devolved into a nasty fight where no one but the attorneys appear to be winning. FunSoft is no longer licensing its software because of a dispute with IBM regarding the availability of 64-bit technology commercially, and/or because of IBM's refusal to grant a continued license or even expressed permission to continue using some licensed code.

Adding to the magic of this disaster, Platform Solutions, Inc. (PSI), which promised a different kind of emulation, even targeting the high-end mainframe environments, entered the fray two years ago. First, PSI was sued by IBM for patent infringement, among other alleged acts, and PSI countered for restraint of trade and violation of anti-trust laws. You can fully examine all the gore and trepidations along with somewhat aggrandized editorial content at www.isham-research.co.uk/ibm-vs-psi-amended.html. PSI just recently reloaded their legal coffers through a new influx of investments from a variety of sources, including Microsoft. And T3 Technologies, a wannabe partner of PSI, has petitioned to join the legal battle against IBM over essentially ruining its business.

There's no net result at this point, except the entire emulation marketplace has evaporated. Low-end mainframe customers have fewer options (although IBM has made significant software pricing concessions to make this more palatable with new z9 processors), and most importantly, new software development by independent vendors has been drastically impacted. As the PWD systems are no longer renewable, small vendors are left with age-old time-sharing at an IBM facility as the only way to gain entrée to advanced environments such as 64-bit. This has all amounted to a stake through the heart of PWD members.

Just read this recent Internet post excerpt from a PWD vendor with the subject "The End Is Near …":

"Having followed the to-ings and fro-ings between IBM and Fundamental for a while, it seems that we are going to expire on 17th February. I have been working on the IBM mainframe for over 20 years, but it seems that this now has to end because:

- *Fundamental will not allow our license to be renewed.*
- *IBM's only (almost) reasonable offering to support our continued development efforts is hosting in Dallas. We are based in the UK, so this does not fill me with joy. Especially having seen the postings on availability.*
- *PSI are being aggressively sued by IBM, and are not a supported platform for the PWD scheme*
- *Real tin is so far beyond our budget as to be impossible to cost justify (10x - 20x more expensive than the FLEX-ES solution).*
- *When we asked around, about clubbing together with some other PWD customers to put up for a jointly owned box, PWD insisted that this would break the agreement and we'd have to pay for full commercial software licenses. There was no room to maneuver and negotiate on this.*
- *Hercules is not supported by PWD and does not include the MVS Assist enhancements …*

I'm not pointing a finger to blame anyone here, I am just underwhelmed by the inability of the parties concerned to assist us, as a customer, with a way forward. I would really like to find a way forward—it just doesn't seem like anyone's interested at our budget level."

Customers are left with nothing to emulate, both in terms of product as well as behavior. Regardless of blame, IBM's commercial and development customers are bearing the weight of their actions, and in line with IBM's constant pledges to do what's right for their constituents, they should move swiftly to make amends. The mainframe needs continued development stimulation, and all customers need affordable solutions. And to keep the mainframe industry in the green, it's up to Big Blue. Nothing else is acceptable.

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

About the Author

ERIC L. VAUGHAN is president and CEO of illustro Systems International, LLC. He has more than 25 years of experience in the IT industry, and is leading illustro Systems in its efforts to help IT management transform their mainframe investments. Comments and suggestions are welcome.
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