This article appeared in the
August/September 2003 issue of

Z/JOURNAL
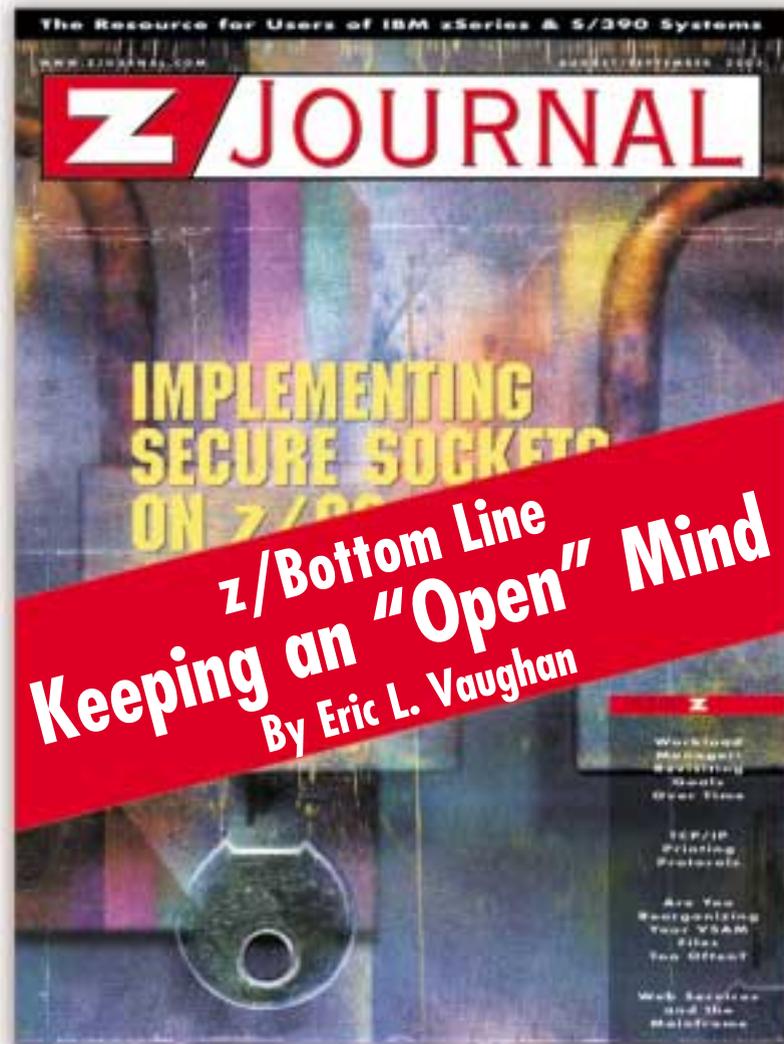
The Resource for Users of IBM zSeries & S/390 Systems

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Keeping an "Open" Mind

BREAKING NEWS: *IBM Corp. (NYSE: IBM) today announced the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has agreed to allow IBM to complete their acquisition of Microsoft Corp. (NASDAQ: MSFT). The DOJ had previously brought an anti-trust action to block the transaction under Section 7 of the Clayton Act. In a startling development, the DOJ conceded that the transaction was in the best interest of the public at large.*

"With the overwhelming market share of servers and desktops now choosing Linux, usage of the Windows platform has fallen to include only die-hard, hobbyist users," said Linus McNeely, chief litigator for the DOJ. "With IBM's enormous investment in Linux that brought legitimacy and confidence to the Linux open source effort, they are in a clear position to lead the IT industry. This transaction will allow IBM to salvage what's left of financially stricken Microsoft's technology and adapt it to customers' needs."

Your biggest fantasy? Your worst nightmare? Rest easy, for now it's all a mere dramatization.

More than anything, this is a warning to all IT managers: Ignore the momentum of open source and join the ranks of the unpaid.

This really isn't a matter of technical debate, nor even just business intellectualism. While there are certainly proper arguments on all sides along these lines, what is happening is more a sociological phenomenon than a technological one.

People do not want to be held hostage, at any time, for any reason. History is replete with countless examples of people who successfully challenged the proverbial thumb that had held them down. The computing industry has created fiefdoms and destroyed kingdoms. In many respects, these honest battles for market share and corporate profit have resulted in "computing tyranny."

First it was IBM's de facto dominance of corporate computing. From the automatic ordering of your next mainframe to the networking monogamy of SNA, IBM reached a point of market arrogance that nearly dealt them a deathblow.

The 1990s brought the advent of client/server computing, offering alternatives, and forcing IBM out of denial. With the spread of these new platforms, a new way to communicate through TCP/IP broke the public free of the chains of SNA. Not because there was anything inherently wrong with SNA, but it was one company's vision. And TCP/IP was borne of a non-profit, non-proprietary vision of communications that allowed everyone to communicate. Free at last.

Fast-forward to the reality of 2003, where Microsoft dominates the desktop worldwide, and Windows Server environments are proliferating throughout the enterprise with their "vision." A distinct parallel; just another mega-corporation dictating direction. However, people eventually break free from that which binds them. Now that we have put the power of computing into the hands of the masses, ideas can rise exponentially.

The latest example is the enormous impact of the Linux operating system. Beyond any prejudices about its technical merits, Linux represents computing democracy in action — the ideas of many represented in a movement that is changing the computing landscape.

How can you tell? A high level of vitriol and attention from your detractors usually means that you are doing something right. IBM has pledged enormous resources to validating and transforming Linux into a commercial platform. The implications are tremendous for the desktop, which Microsoft clearly dominates. It also portends threats to the midrange server market, again led by Microsoft Servers followed closely by proprietary Unix implementations. IBM is the only one to offer the full range of computing with the deft port to the zSeries mainframe environment. The original "dictator" has morphed into the leader of the computing free world with bold moves that barely drew notice – but not any more.

Widely reported was the March 2003 lawsuit brought by dwarfish SCO Corp. against IBM for $1 billion, alleging that IBM misappropriated SCO's Unix source to assist in the commercialization and building of the Linux platform. In May, SCO upped the ante by demanding $3 billion in damages and terminating IBM's right to license AIX, IBM's derivation of the SCO Unix code. Industry mogul Microsoft quickly announced a partnership with SCO, coinciding with the actions. That sounds like attention!

Nearly simultaneously, the city of Munich, Germany brewed up a dramatic story, announcing that it would be switching from Microsoft software to open source software based on the Linux operating system. Despite reports of some friendly arm-breaking by Microsoft's CEO, Munich held fast — 14,000 PCs to be switched. A closer look reveals a pattern, not an aberration. Last June, the German Interior Ministry and IBM signed a deal to provide Linux systems for police and security authorities across Germany.

For the mainframe environment, Linux offers customers a way to immediately provide server consolidation on a dramatic scale, eliminating the need for the overly complex and costly configuration of server rabbits, multiplying to accommodate the next batch of users. This is the most logical step for Linux on zSeries implementations and can expand to include application porting as appropriate.

History has always proved that freedom of choice and ideas provides the most enduring solution. Wake up! There is computing democracy at work here. Just keep an Open Mind.

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 20 years of experience in the IT industry and is leading illustro in its focus on helping IT managers find answers to their existing investments.
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