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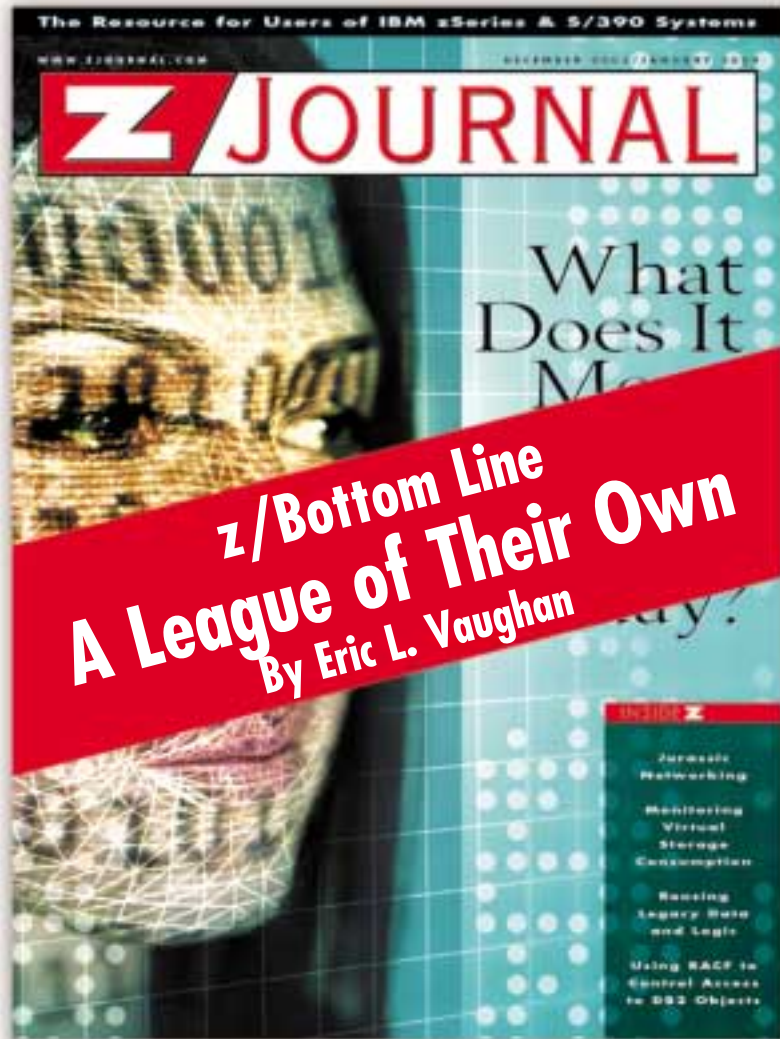
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A League of Their Own

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Warring factions within the ranks. Architectural options that are more sand than foundation. Pressure from the top to achieve better ROI. Paranoia from below to adopt the next great trend or face technical oblivion. Labyrinths of vendor pricing issues requiring an economics degree to decipher.

Down two runs, bottom of the ninth with two outs; there's never been a tougher time to be an IT executive.

The position has morphed over the years from being one of leadership in technical knowledge and industry trends into being a member of the bottom-line business team who also happens to know that Java isn't found only in a cup.

CIO, SVP of MIS, IT manager—regardless of the title, this position has crossed boundaries from technical leadership to one of managing the most important, and frequently the most expensive, investment an enterprise has today. Gartner forecasted global IT spending in 2003 at $2.1 trillion. That's more than the annual Gross Domestic Product for all the countries in the world, except for the top four—the U.S., China, Japan, and India! So, in reality, the collective top IT buck-stoppers are managing an economy on an unimaginable scale.

When the economy falters based on one indicator or another, how often is wasteful spending pointed to as a travesty of finance? What's the true global impact when an investment portfolio totaling $2.1 *trillion* is mismanaged, or at best, the speculation didn't pay off? The contribution to the jobless rate, the profit margins of the largest companies in the world, the inability to enrich the world's supply chain—are all dramatically affected by the IT decisions that are made or missed.

So, it's not enough to understand why XML may make sense for the business. It is less than adequate to debate: Java or .NET? The bottom line is that IT managers are directly responsible for the bottom line in a way that is more profound than is realized.

The top IT exec's role is only to consistently demand one answer to every question: What is the ROI of this technology/change/effort/product in terms of money/time/personnel/upheaval? Since strategic vs. tactical thinking is aimed at the long term, what better strategy is there than to stay in business?

One of the most important challenges for the top IT exec is finding sources of information and input into their decision-making process. How do they feed the brain? There's a myriad of sources, but mostly all biased. Airline magazines long touted as must-reading for the traveling executive are products of companies' public relations campaigns. Even turning to trusted in-house staff tends to invite only parochial views based on background and experience along a particular platform—and often results in unwanted battles between groups.

So, where can the IT execs turn for real input that might make or break their company?

Networking among peers is the only real answer. Only shared pain and common challenges can set the table for a candid discussion of the real issues. Unfortunately, there's been no movement toward providing such a network, largely because this valuable "cabinet" post has been ignored, as hard as that is to believe.

For the mainframe IT executive, the challenge is multiplied even further. While there are scores of trade journals that address multiple platforms and disciplines, there was no clear voice for the mainframe community with management-focused content until *z/Journal's* innovative emergence in early 2003. Although *z/Journal* provides helpful information that focuses on the day-to-day challenges of IT and IT management, it doesn't fully address the need for bi-directional exchange of ideas and insight.

THE MAINFRAME EXECUTIVE FORUM

Mainframe IT executives may get a league of their own to come to bat with their teammates in a networking forum that could make the difference. As Bob Thomas wrote in this issue's publisher's page, *z/Journal* is prospecting a unique event called the Mainframe Executive Forum, which would be a periodic gathering focused on the information needs of mainframe executives. Sessions would be designed and offered strictly from a management point of view. Top management from vendors would be on hand to address key issues with the group.

z/Journal has the reputation and the model to ensure the Mainframe Executive Forum would objectively deliver the expected value and wealth of information executives need. Let *z/Journal* know what you think by sharing your thoughts. Contact Bob Thomas at bob@zjournal.com (please put Mainframe Executive Forum as the subject of your e-mail).

Don't wait for a pinch-hitter. The IT execs are up to bat and need this input—the world's economy is riding on it.

That's z/Bottom Line. **z**

About the Author

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