

z/Bottom Line



ERIC L. VAUGHAN

Plenty to Bark About

Our dog Elle is always sentimental this time of year. With her holiday social calendar replete with various canine/feline mixers, she barely has time for dinner with the family. But when she realized it was time to reflect and prognosticate for the mainframe industry, she gave me a few minutes, leaving us with her thoughts on 2006 and what's to come in 2007.

A Twin Star

One of the most significant announcements of 2006 was the May introduction of IBM's new line of System z9 Business Class (z9 BC) mainframes. Reaching back into Greek mythology, this project was code-named Pollux within IBM. Pollux is one of the brightest stars in the sky, having risen there as one of the two stars of the Gemini Twins. Pollux also was the brother of Helen of Troy; we shouldn't draw any conclusions from this allegory. But it does appear the z9 BC offering shines bright in many ways.

The z9 BC delivered the same powerful technology that first debuted in 2005 in the z990 processors (rebranded concurrent with this announcement as the z9 EC), but the BC brought the scalable range of processors down into the entry level for mainframe customers. Customers can now choose a single hardware architecture/footprint to power their mainframes from 26 to 17,800 MIPS, a range of scalability never seen before in mainframe circles. Accompanying the announcement were some substantial software price reductions, with promises of even better usage-based pricing to further reduce the cost of mainframe computing. An excellent write-up (complete with some much needed humor) can be found at www.itjungle.com/big/big050206-story01.html.

What Is This, z/Vista?

On October 4, 2006, IBM "... revealed a cross-company effort to make the IBM System z mainframe ... easier to use for a greater number of computer professionals by 2011. The goal of this five-year effort, which will include an investment of approximately \$100 million, is to enable technology (users) to more easily program, manage, and administer a mainframe."

IBM has finally seen the light. It's the interface that counts. Tremendous improvements in processor performance, scalability and economics just aren't enough. Friends don't let friends use 3270 interfaces. Sys admins across other platforms all use Web-based interfaces to administer their systems. IBM's announcement makes it clear that the road to continued viability is to bridge the divide on how to touch and interact with a system. With

important AJAX technology delivering Windows-like functionality in a Web browser, and now available for mainframe platforms, robust Web 2.0 applications can be written to belie the fact that a mainframe is even the engine powering the software. This needs to happen; watch for more drama in the mainframe interface market in 2007.

Encryption in Abundance

Elle successfully forecasted the importance of encryption for 2006 among the technology community. We close the year with a spate of offerings in just about every flavor, including IBM's needed addition of encryption technology within tape hardware itself. As predicted in this space last year, 2006 proved to be the year of encryption, as every guardian of data saw their greatest fears realized through industry horror stories about the mishandling of information. This exposure and reaction fundamentally changed a four-decade old routine of managing data, and improved every person's privacy.

Nothing But Nets

Finally, in the June 2006 "z/Bottom Line" column, we focused on the efforts of the sporting industry to urge the purchase of mosquito nets to save African children from the exploding pandemic of malaria. A columnist from *Sports Illustrated*, Rick Reilly, started the effort with oblique references to all the "nets" in sports, but the one that mattered in his mind were the nets we could be providing for \$20. In our column, we focused on the same; since we all live in and around the 'Net in our business, we urged readers to help as well. Update: The Nothing But Nets campaign encouraged 17,000-plus donations and chipped in more than \$1.2 million—enough to buy 150,000 nets. With a mortality rate of 3,000 African children each day, this was a bold step started with a couple of magazines' help that made a difference. For any "z/Bottom Line" reader who joined in, great work! There's still time to help this worthy cause at www.nothingbutnets.net.

Elle is too sweet to bite, so her bark is definitely her most distinguishing feature. The mainframe industry still gives her plenty to bark about. Don't expect that to change.

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.

Email: evaughan@illustro.com; Website: www.illustro.com