

ISVs on VSE's Heritage & Future: AN INTERVIEW

BY GABE GOLDBERG

Any celebration of VSE must include Independent Software Vendors (ISVs), which supply real-world customer solutions. We asked five representative vendors for reactions to recent VSE news. They include Software AG's Peter Harris, illustrative Systems' Eric Vaughan, Computer Associates' Mark Combs, Connectivity Systems International's Leo Langevin, and Thigpen Enterprises' Tony Thigpen.

z/Journal: *What is the significance of VSE's 40th anniversary?*

Eric Vaughan: VSE/ESA's staying power can't be over-dramatized. This "fledgling" operating system was never meant as more than a stop-gap solution, but excellent technology and a determined customer base helped VSE weather storms that threatened its existence.

Peter Harris: It points out that VSE was well-built and has lasted very well. IBM has done a lot to make VSE play in the platforms of Windows, Unix, and Linux. Another key point is VSE's low maintenance manpower overhead.

Mark Combs: VSE, directly descended from early S/360 business systems, set the stage for z/VSE, z/VM and z/OS operating systems, all variations on the gold standard for business solutions. On its 40th anniversary, VSE succeeds when other operating systems have risen and fallen.

Leo Langevin: VSE, longer lived than most of today's PC operating systems, is a solid and viable operating system.

z/Journal: *What is your reaction to the z/VSE 3.1 announcements?*

EV: This announcement is extremely important as IBM welcomes VSE into the z/Family. Executives of organizations throughout the world must view VSE as a strategic technology partner.

TT: SCSI attachment will reduce DASD costs and help sites on tight budgets. Too many people predict(ed) VSE's death. Inclusion of VSE in the "z" world helps overcome naysayers.

PH: It helps the IBM zSeries brand better align with z/OS and z/VM. It's an important message to VSE's very loyal customer base.

MC: The zSeries designation affirms the importance of this robust OS in varied IT strategies. It also assures the VSE base of continued support and a future in zSeries family technology investments.

LL: It tells us that, despite decades of rumors, IBM sees a future for VSE.

z/Journal: *What are z/VSE 3.1's strengths and weaknesses?*

EV: Most significant is the name itself. z/VSE powers billion-dollar businesses such as one running native VSE/ESA on a new 660 MIPS z/890. Another newly exploited strength is VSE/ESA Connectors. These easily integrate multiple platforms with VSE—even allowing Java programs on other platforms to seamlessly interact with VSE data and applications.

z/VSE's most significant weakness is the same as z/OS's—green-screen 3270 technology. The mainframe's image remains on these screens, implying that mainframes are obsolete; yet, only the 3270 is. This weakness is a critical part of decisions to migrate to other platforms.

PH: z/VSE's strength is its new SCSI DASD interface, which will lower VSE's cost of ownership. I would like additional functionality such as 64-bit zSeries architecture features.

TT: Strengths include dependability, dependability, and dependability. A weakness is the 255-task limit.

MC: z/VSE's leading strength is its production-proven deployment and its low maintenance requirements, which provide good ROI. The limit of 255 current active tasks and the dispatcher limitation of one active CPU per partition leave room for improvement.

z/Journal: *What have been VSE's best and worst moments?*

EV: The best was VSE/ESA's announcement in 1990. Bernd Robotzek, VSE Development lab director, declared that "we made a mistake—we took our eye off the ball." IBM then promised to never do so again, and to continue supporting and enhancing the platform. They have kept their word. A worst moment was in 1988, when a senior IBMer essentially told GUIDE'S VSE User Group that VSE was dead and that migration to MVS was our only alternative. He basically said, "You will go to MVS, or you will go to Hell!" Most of us asked, "What's the difference?"

TT: The best were when VSE received multiple address spaces, 31-bit support, and dynamic partitions. The worst were statements such as "VSE will never have address spaces."

LL: When IBM closed source code, we

sure cried! But the best things came from establishing user groups all over the world, where we share information and exchange fancy resolutions.

z/Journal: *Is there increasing use of Linux with VSE?*

EV: VSE integrates strongly with Linux. For example, Linux UDB relational technology interacting with VSE data and resources on a HiperSockets-connected mainframe provides tremendous advantages over UDB spread over slower, distributed Intel systems. New technologies for inter-platform collaboration let COBOL applications interact with other application strategies, perhaps even unifying different technical cultures.

PH: Multiple industry segments are installing Linux on zSeries for modern application solutions with reduced cost of mainframe ownership while benefiting from VSE-based data and back-end systems. Linux on zSeries also supports abundant packaged solutions.

TT: z/VSE and Linux on zSeries are becoming so tightly coupled that they will almost be considered a "product pair." They will each require the other to reach their full potential.

MC: Yes, many VSE sites remain loyal because they can accomplish business objectives at lower cost than through competing z/OS and z/VM solutions. Like VSE, Linux offers lower IT cost.

LL: Through TCP/IP, most Linux clients—especially major ones that people are used to—can speak with VSE servers and vice versa.

z/Journal: *In what way do ISVs affect VSE evolution?*

PH: ISVs have developed solutions as VSE evolved. Vendors exploit items such as 31-bit storage, data spaces, and the Turbo Dispatcher to improve function and price/performance. Recent ISV solutions let customers modernize applications without rewriting them.

TT: System tool ISVs have driven VSE's future. They've met customer needs more cost-efficiently than a large corporation such as IBM can.

MC: CA works with IBM's Early Adoption program to understand new

releases and collaborate on release features and overall direction.

LL: Without vendors, VSE would have disappeared. Innovative individuals and organizations outside VSE development provide solutions that make VSE a vibrant Internet-enabled system that's part of business-critical processing.

z/Journal: *How do IBM and ISVs collaborate on meeting VSE sites' needs?*

EV: A formal Vendor Council has met yearly since 1988 with VSE's management and development team to exchange feedback on plans and submit requests, ensuring successful introductions of new releases.

TT: IBM provides direct communication between ISVs and VSE developers, giving ISVs information to correctly hook products into VSE. Sometimes, IBM's nasty OCO (Object Code Only; i.e., program source code unavailable to non-IBMers) policy increases vendor effort making products work with VSE.

MC: CA and IBM work closely through IBM's Early Adoption program to understand new features and behaviors and to ensure that our solutions perform consistently.

LL: We respond to customer needs identified by IBM. Users also contact us directly; if IBM involvement is needed, they get information necessary to make everyone happy.

z/Journal: *What message about the future do you have for the VSE community?*

LL: VSE belongs in colleges, along with Linux and Windows servers.

EV: As VSE technology adapts to emerging capabilities, VSE customers should draw confidence from the staying power and overwhelming success that thousands of organizations have achieved through VSE technology. And the IBM VSE Development Lab's outstanding quality ensures that we can count on their innovation.

PH: VSE will continue to grow and ISVs will continue to offer solutions on the platform that exploit new functionality.

TT: VSE is changing and we must change, too. We're not dealing with the VSE we knew in the past. Exploit new

tools such as Redirectors and Linux on zSeries, since that's where major VSE improvements will be.

MC: With IBM's commitment to driving VSE direction as a member of the zSeries family, customer technology solutions can focus more on business drivers, with less restrictive consideration on the OS platform. CA views VSE as a critical business platform, with renewed growth and opportunity.

z/Journal: *Finally, please describe products/services your company offers to the VSE community.*

PH: Software AG provides a real-time single view of strategic business information by integrating applications and systems, in addition to modernizing mainframe and open system IT environments. Offerings are based on product families Adabas, Natural, EntireX, and Tamino.

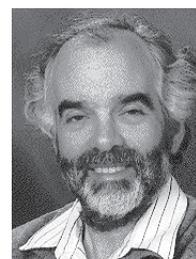
EV: illustro Systems offers services and internally developed software. Products, focused on mainframe Internet-enablement, include z/Web-Host and z/XML-Host.

TT: VSE2PDF, our primary product, brings the look of reports into the 21st century with improved appearance and security.

MC: Computer Associates (CA) has a long history of providing rich, VSE-based enterprise management, security, and storage solutions.

LL: CSI created the TCP/IP stack for VSE when its future looked bleak because it was the only operating system excluded from Internet connectivity. The stack and its numerous clients and servers revitalized VSE and are accepted by IBM as a critical part of VSE's future. **Z**

About the Author



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