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What is it about this computing specimen called the mainframe? Forty-four years after its dramatic unveiling that forever changed the world, it continues to not only endure, but, in fact, lead the entire global computing industry. As the celebrated depository of at least 60 percent of the world's information, it's not

only the *mainframe*, but the very *mainstay* of the industry.

As a devout lover of words, I wanted to plunge deeper into an analysis of this important adjective, so I sought the input of an authority, in fact, G.O.D. The bible of words—the Great *Oxford (English) Dictionary* defines it as: *main-stay* [meyn-stey]-noun. *A person or thing that acts as a chief support or part. Synonyms: pillar, bulwark, anchor, prop.*

A thing that acts as a “chief” part of what exactly? Well, certainly a principal part of the backbone of data centers worldwide, and that has remained unchanged for more than four decades. But, in fact, the mainframe also is the mainstay of the world's economy and infrastructure at large. Trillions of dollars/euros/yen, et al., are entrusted to the technological wisdom of the mainframe through various worldwide banks, market exchanges, and other stalwart financial institutions. The very power running through the veins of our homes and businesses is managed, tracked, and accounted for in the utility industry by the sturdy shoulders of the mainframe. The FBI's most wanted list; the international terrorist watch directories; every American's IRS tax information—all depend in some way on the stiff backbone of the mainframe.

And the mainframe is certainly the anchoring pillar of IBM itself. While IBM literally bet the bank (and the payroll) in 1964 on the success of this new announcement, the mainframe today adds billions of dollars to IBM's revenue each quarter through hardware, software, maintenance, and services. And it isn't as if IBM is merely collecting annuity payments, content to just rest on its cache of chips to continue to build record revenues. IBM has been consistently innovative through the years, literally repeatedly reinventing mainframe technology. IBM has developed new processes internally as well as adapted to other companies' manufacturing economies, allowing the mainframe to morph from a water-cooled-full-floor-consuming-proprietary-glass-house-Goliath-like-piece-of-metal to just another box in the corner—smaller in fact than most of your rack-mounted servers. IBM has blown its software doors wide open, not only embracing its previous slingshot-wielding David (aka client/server systems), but helping to pave the way for truly non-proprietary, open systems

standards, even giving Linux the most robust home available. To keep pace with the growing demand of the world's thirst for universal data access, IBM accepted TCP/IP as the industry's gateway to intercommunication, allowing its own SNA products to take a back seat to the way all computers, across brands and architectures, now communicate. And to ensure the more than exponential growth of demand could be served with response times that everyone came to expect, we grew from the fastest 1964 mainframe of only 0.03 MIPS to the most recent announcement of the z10 Enterprise Class, which is reportedly peaking at 30,000 MIPS, in a smaller footprint, requiring less energy than any previous system while costing substantially less money in comparable terms.

The mainframe turns out to be not only the enduring pillar of strength as described, but actually the greener grass that all other companies in the industry covet. Starting with Mr. Gates' Wild Software Company (aka Microsoft), its marketers searched high and low when introducing new server offerings, and found the best point of reference was the mainframe (<http://tinyurl.com/4bae2r>). Stanford University's Network (nee Sun Microsystems) apparently heeded the same advice when announcing software management capabilities for its Sun servers to the industry (<http://tinyurl.com/43s7qx>). HP, which is in the process of gobbling up Ross Perot's brainchild, EDS, reputedly to compete more directly with IBM, also has turned blue with envy, and could find no better measure of success than the very mainframe that has now brought you to *Mainframe Executive* (<http://tinyurl.com/3ecxhm>).

What does this mean to you as an IT executive? The successful CIO today understands how to blend the complex array of technologies into a synthesis that serves their business. They're also artful at avoiding the religious platform wars that misguide plans for the sake of satisfying colloquial beliefs, both internally and externally. It's a matter of understanding the relative strengths and weaknesses of what resources are available, whether equipment or people, and looking for the best way to bring out the best in each. But when you're heading into the next planning cycle that could become a techno-fox-hole, there will never be a better partner to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you to ensure you come out alive than your trusted mainfriend. Mainstay, indeed.

That Sums it up. **ME**

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Mainstay