

z/BOTTOM LINE

MainFrames for Life?



ERIC L. VAUGHAN

Here in Dallas, Texas, dot.com wunderkind-cum-billionaire-cum-pro-basketball owner Mark Cuban is really enjoying himself. He took his unbridled passion for Indiana basketball and decided that here in Texas he just had to be able to listen to the Indiana games, live. That passion turned into the founding of the company Broadcast.com and enabled the development of the technology to allow radio and other live audio to be broadcast over the Internet. A few years later, Yahoo! decided they couldn't live without that technology and paid over \$6 billion for the company. Cuban was only able to pocket about \$1.6 billion but now he could turn his attention to what he really loved. He bought Dallas' pro-basketball team, the Dallas Mavericks.

From the very start, Dallasites took notice that this was to be no ordinary sports owner. Basketball was his passion, and he was willing to do whatever it took to make the team successful. He still sits in the same seats he held as a fan. He is at every single game, usually dressed in his trademark jeans and T-shirt, leading the cheers like the most enthusiastic of fans. Cuban has made sure that his basketball players would be coddled by outfitting them with their own Boeing 757 for travel, upgraded hotels, and a locker room complete with a home-entertainment system in each locker. If you go to the Dallas Mavericks offices you find an array of cubicles for everyone, with Cuban in the first cube as you walk in the door. Staffers will quickly offer you a soda, ice cream — whatever you like. You instantly get the idea that this is no ordinary billionaire, no ordinary professional team owner.

And it works. It works because of passion. Parked right outside of the Mavericks office is Cuban's new Lexus — with his personalized license plate that says, "MFFL" — Mavs Fan For Life, the name of the official fan club.

With the backdrop of this kind of zealous passion and pursuit of success, it makes you wonder: Has the industrial strength and continued stamina of mainframe computers withstood all the industry challenges suggest that we have in effect created a similar fan club? MFFL — MainFrames For Life!

Consider the recent "plight" of the mainframe. Developed as the first commercial-class computers for all the world over 30 years ago, the mainframe has alternated as savior and evil-doer for many of the last dozen years. While the mainframe powered nearly every organizations' computing resources up until the start of the 1990s, the birth of the client/server craze at that point seemed to spell their doom. Mainframes were old. Mainframes were expensive. Mainframes were toast.

The bevy of vendors from database to hardware manufacturers rushed to show the world that they could do it faster, better, and cheaper than anything that had come before. Many companies believed it to be true and immediately launched their \$20 million dollar, "inexpensive" conversion to be done in 6 to 12 months. As the story has been well-written, three years and many extra millions of dollars later, many found this sim-

ple plug/pull conversion to be anything but simple. Many companies lost production and profits. Others lost face.

When the Year/2000 challenge arose as the paramount focus of ITers worldwide, we were able to take an unusual inventory. Interesting statistics were revealed: "Trillions" of lines of COBOL code had been written. Over 70 percent of the world's data still resided on mainframes. All this data flew in the face of the rash of highly publicized conversions to anything non-mainframe. It seemed that the mainframe had been more of a bedrock than many had realized.

Now the mainframe has been taken seriously across all computing platforms as the harbinger of serious, business-ready computing. IBM describes its new pSeries 630 model Unix-class server as "bringing mainframe-inspired logical partitioning to entry servers." In January 2003, Sun Microsystems announced that their "Sun Fire 6800 server offers mainframe-class availability and resource management features." Intel Corp. describes servers using their processors as having "four-way and eight-way application servers to mainframe-class servers with up to 64 processors." In fact, search for the term "mainframe-class" on nearly all serious server manufacturers' Websites and you'll be amazed to see the need to match up. Suddenly in 2003, the mainframe has become the benchmark by which all others compare and contrast their solutions.

Where does the mainframe go from here? There is a bright future as integration and rejuvenation technologies are building important bridges between the attributes of the "mainframe-class" and emerging technologies. The mainframe's interfaces of antiquity will give way to standard, Web-based navigation. This will allow system admins across platforms to engage the mainframe as one of their own servers, and open applications to the world of millions of Web-able users. Enterprise Application Integration (EAI) strategies, including important XML and Web services capabilities, will deliver for data and applications what TCP/IP brought in connectivity. While new and additional platforms will continue to integrate across the computing landscape, the mainframe's role as a mainstay will continue to anchor IT.

Mark Cuban had many good ideas — and we'll have to borrow this one from him as we officially name the de facto fan club. Welcome z/Journal, back to keeping the mainframe world informed, and welcome to our fan club — MainFrames For Life!

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

About the Author

Eric L. Vaughan is president and CEO of Illustro Systems International, LLC. He has over 20 years of experience in the IT industry and is leading Illustro Systems in its focus on helping IT managers find answers to leverage their existing investments. Voice: 214-800-8900; e-Mail: evaughan@illustro.com.