

z/Bottom Line



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A Dog's View

Delivering this column throughout the year has been an interesting challenge, not the least because of the exploits of our one-year-old Queensland-Heeler, Elle. With a keen interest in computer equipment as her own personal play toys, it seemed my keyboard and/or mouse were inevitably missing about the same time I was on deadline.

But something different happened this time. When Elle heard me discussing the idea for this column—mainframe highlights in 2005—she actually dropped my slippers and instead fetched my mouse to make sure we could get this one done.

Seems Elle's mood is quite upbeat with respect to the year's mainframe events. She even gave me her top-five:

- **IBM's introduction of the z9:** Mainframe as a dinosaur? Then this one is certainly king of the jungle. The announcement of the IBM System z9 109 in July delivered tremendous power and unmatched scalability in a reduced footprint. One of the most significant innovations in the z9 extends the availability metrics of the mainframe to the type of "Non-Stop" benchmarks the old Tandem computers achieved. This new feature creates the ability to actually quiesce and hot-swap malfunctioning "books" of processors in-flight, without causing a system outage or even conceptually a reduction in performance.
- **The importance of encryption:** As recently noted in this column, an all-points bulletin was issued earlier this year by auditors, corporate boards, and CxOs when an age-old exposure was suddenly "discovered." The tradition of moving data offsite for "safe keeping" in unencrypted form became an instant exposure for breach of confidentiality and privacy laws. Iron Mountain's foibles added to the magnification of the issue. Consequently, the vendor community has deftly announced a slate of solutions to help customers fill this gap. This will be an important technology trend for 2006.
- **VSE Celebrates life and joins the ranks:** Long the stepchild of the mainframe community, the VSE operating system has organic staying power that even Viagra users would envy. In 2005, the VSE community celebrated 40 years of delivering value to customers. But 2005 was also special, as VSE was officially welcomed into the "z" family, joining zSeries, z/OS, and z/VM as the monikers designating IBM's modern technology. While VSE users are found in all sizes, they wholly make up the low-end range of the mainframe marketplace. And this wouldn't

have continued to be possible without the sheer technologic wizardry of Fundamental Software, Inc.'s (FSI) FLEX-ES product providing zSeries emulation in an Intel server, which delivers cost-effective hardware for the low-end market. As VSE continues to contribute 10-digit revenue annually to IBM's coffers, they forever owe a debt of gratitude to the industry contributions that FSI's CEO Carl Ross has made.

- **SOA:** I love this industry. Only when combined with the military do we have any competition in the pursuit of the arcane. Much of that is due to our propensity to insist on talking in smart-sounding acronyms and architectures. The 2005 winner in this legacy is undoubtedly the obsession with saying, writing about, and touting Service-Oriented Architecture, or SOA. But unlike a close predecessor in name only (remember SAA?), this one has a strong chance to make a dramatic impact on the seemingly impossible distribution of applications and data we've created over the years. Through the beauty of XML (there we go again!) and its derivatives, the dream of "de-Babelizing" our data for users' free and ready access may be realized.
- **The Old Gray Hair ...** (sung to the tune of "The Old Gray Mare") he is what he used to be ... is what he used to be ... is what he used to be ... But not for long! Tremendous awareness of the plight of the aging mainframe workforce touched a real nerve in the community. *z/Journal's* coverage throughout the year helped highlight the biggest threat of all to the mainframe's continued viability—the rapidly retiring pace of the caregivers. Excellent strides were made to solve this problem, including IBM and SHARE's joint announcement of zNextGen, a new "global community for students and young IT professionals interested in mainframe computing." Excellent steps forward and a broad reversal from the lack of efforts we started the year with.

So eat, drink and be merry during this time of pause, reflection, and family. If Elle can see this much optimism in the ever-maligned mainframe industry, there must be something to it.

And that's z/Bottom Line. Z

About the Author

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