

This article appeared in the
December/January 2005 issue of



Subscribe instantly at
www.zjournal.com

- Free in the U.S. and Canada
- \$48 per year outside of the U.S. and Canada

Deep Blue



ANURA GURUGÉ

The Mainframe Migration Alliance: A New Theatre in the Linux War

The Microsoft Mainframe Alliance, a group spearheaded by Microsoft that wishes to help customers migrate workloads from mainframes onto Microsoft platforms, was founded in April 2004. The timing was audacious, to say the least. April, as many of you recall, was also the widely commemorated 40th anniversary of IBM mainframes. It was the time when many of us were publicly gloating as to how very, very wrong the naysayers of the '90s were with their dire predictions of the eminent demise of mainframes. So, the MMA with their bold charter, which states they are focusing on mainframe workloads and even ignoring AS/400s, came out of the blue. Needless to say, it totally befuddled those of us who thought Big Blue with Linux, the zSeries Application Assist Processor (zAAP), HiperSockets, the z8xxs, Gigabit OSA-Express, Secure Sockets Layer (SSL)-acceleration, etc., had been doing all the right things to keep the mainframe value proposition credible.

Not Another "Jurassic Park" Sequel

For those of us who used the term "The Dinosaur Myth" to deflect the detractors who had accused mainframes of being soon-to-be-extinct dinosaurs, this was, at first, akin to being forced to endure another "Jurassic Park" rerun. It had all the makings of the dinosaur story being cloned yet again. But then—like in the movies—the fog parted.

This was different. This wasn't at all Jurassic Park! It was Winston Churchill and Dwight Eisenhower during WW II. This was about the creation of a new "theatre of operations," away from the primary theatre, to buy time to ramp-up resources for the main attack—where the enemy in this case is not mainframes, but Linux. I have to admit, albeit with chagrin, that I'm impressed.

Us mainframe partisans, including IBM, have to admit, perhaps through gritted teeth, that we set the stage for the MMA. We have been pushing Linux and Linux LPARs. What the MMA is saying, from what I can see, is, "Hey, if you are considering Linux as an 'off-load' platform, don't forget Windows 2003 is also an option."

Some of you, no doubt, are now gagging on words such as "security," "reliability," and even "scalability." But we should all take some deep breaths, relax, and look at this objectively—as I kept on telling myself for nearly a month before I succeeded in realizing this wasn't a "Pearl Harbor" on our beloved mainframes.

Not for All Customers, Nor for All Times

Some have already commented that MMA is not really going after z/OS customers but instead targeting smaller customers running VSE or VM on "legacy" (i.e., pre-zSeries)

machines. I think there's more to it than that. From what I can *now* see, the MMA isn't overtly advocating the outright displacement of mainframes. Instead, what they emphasize is migrating mainframe workloads—and with Microsoft in charge, they are much too savvy to, however openly, commit to what percentage of a mainframe's workload they are referring to. But, I think, it is safe to say, for at least the time being, that they aren't going after 100 percent of the workload.

That makes all the difference! Despite how they first come across, this, in my opinion, isn't a mainframe displacement ploy but an augmentation play. We should all be "cool" with that.

Despite the continuing increase in mainframe workloads, we all know that even the most committed of mainframe customers are regularly moving some applications off mainframes onto other platforms. We saw this with "off-the-shelf" ERP applications à la SAP R/3. IBM even makes it easy with its multi-platform support for DB2 and WebSphere, not to mention CICS. So, the real issues here are Windows vs. Linux, and the optimum platform for Linux server consolidation.

So, we are back to the "why Windows rather than enterprise Linux" debate. Interestingly, scalability is, however, not so much of a factor anymore. First with AMD Opteron, Intel Itanium 2, Windows clustering, and Blade systems, hardware per se is no longer an impediment. The potential hardware platforms for Windows, though not in the z990 class, are getting increasingly more powerful and larger. But remember, we are also not talking displacement—just augmentation. So security and reliability are what you have to convince yourself about. And then to really muddy these waters, we now have IBM's POWER5-based p5 machines that give you Unix and Linux, not to mention state-of-the-art virtualization.

So, here's the bottom line: If you intend to migrate some workloads off the mainframe, heed what the MMA is saying, and by all means consider Windows. But before you commit to anything, be ready to look your CEO straight in the eyes, and say without blushing, "We have really evaluated all options and all viable platforms, and spent a lot of time looking at Linux and p5s." **Z**

About the Author

Anura Gurugé, an ex-IBMer (1974-1980) at Hursley, U.K., was "Mr. SNA" for more than two decades. Visit his Website for other details of his books and work.
e-Mail: anu@wownh.com • Website: www.guruge.com