

IBM: Taking the Risk out of Migration

By Clay Ryder

One issue that any organisation will eventually face is the need for refresh of aging technology. While a system may have represented the state of the art when it was installed, over time any solution begins to lose its cost-effectiveness. Although many believe refreshing technology is as simple as calling the vendor who provided the solution, a company should consider whether the original supplier necessarily has the best solution today. Whether the purchase is for a refresh of an out-of-date system with high maintenance costs or for upgrade to address operational limitations, customers should carefully weigh the risk in staying with a given vendor or migrating to another. In many cases, a refresh is an opportune time at which to consider the value proposition of a platform migration and to evaluate which vendor could best meet the customer's current needs.

Looking to the Future of Systems

Organisations of all sizes have come to rely on IT investments to power their endeavors. As technology continues its advancement in capability and cost performance, there is an ever increasing opportunity for enterprising organisations to harness this ability into a competitive business advantage. At the same time, aging solutions that have served customers well for years are no longer sufficient to meet increased workloads and/or are reaching the point where ongoing maintenance costs will exceed the potential cost of technology refresh. Given the notable changes in the marketplace in the last decade, a number of platforms have been placed on a retirement path or have become de-supported by vendors, leaving customers with some strategic choices to be made about the future of their IT infrastructure. However, the choice of underlying technology is no longer driven by technical excellence alone; there are several other factors of paramount concern for any customer making investments in IT solutions.

What are Key Considerations in Determining an IT Vendor?

Given the cost pressure IT organisations face, it is important that IT investments provide a solid return on investment (ROI), both for the present and for the future. Solutions based on products whose roadmaps are unclear, or that present future disruptive changes to underlying hardware or software, represent a risk to the customer. Likewise, solutions that cannot scale to meet future requirements of the organisation involve substantial risk and potentially lower ROI. Solutions that are proprietary in nature are also a cause for concern as the IT investment is tied to a supplier who may choose to discontinue the technology and leave organisations without alternative sourcing options.

Successful platforms require a rich ecosystem of support. This ecosystem should consist of myriad participants including platform vendors, integrators, VAR, developers, and open source communities, among others. Applications are the key value ultimately delivered to the customer; without them, there is little use for the underlying infrastructure. It is simply not possible for a limited number of suppliers to support a platform and still make it viable in the broader market, as the range of customer needs and solutions sought demand the participation of the best-of-breed suppliers across a multitude of vertical specialties and horizontal expertise.

Meeting the Needs of the Marketplace: IBM and its eServer Family of Server Offerings

IBM is a well-known player in the IT marketplace and has a history of innovation that spans decades. But does this historic technological acumen translate into value and stability for customers seeking IT solutions today? Let's examine how Big Blue measures up against the key considerations in choosing an IT vendor today.

IBM provides one of the broadest platform choices of any systems vendor. With the venerable System z mainframe, the RISC based UNIX System p, the stalwart integrated i5 solution, the Industry Standard x86-based System x, or the state-of-the-art BladeCenter, IBM offers customers a range of hardware choices. Operating systems include Windows on System x and i5, AIX and i5/OS on the i5 and System p, z/OS on the mainframe and Linux on any IBM platform. The POWER and Intel/AMD x86 architectures are available in standalone systems, blades, and SMP implementations. Customers of any size should find configurations to meet their needs, be it an Express offering for entry to mid level organisations, a highly scalable i5/p5 model 595, or the security and stability of the System z9. Customers using Linux or AIX can scale from a 1-way p5 505 up to a 64-way p5 595 without changing architecture or operating system. Other vendors' high-end scaling requires a change of CPU (HP with Itanium) or operating system (Sun X25 with Solaris), which is a change of platform rather than true platform scaling.

Servers are just one component of the IT infrastructure and today many are seeing demands placed upon their storage capabilities that were unfathomable just a few years ago. IBM offers a variety of storage solutions based upon tape, optical, or disk that are designed to meet the needs of the smallest up to the largest enterprises.

The company provides the professional and managed services that deliver demonstrable customer value so organisations can focus on their core competencies without needing to become IT experts. One key offering is Migration Services: IBM AMS provides migration assessments and services to analyse and expedite moving from competitive solutions to IBM's with minimal risk. There is a range of services that address migration issues such as cutover and training beyond simply getting code to execute. More importantly the services do not require an all-IBM-or-nothing approach, e.g., a client wishing to migrate from a SUN system to IBM System p system while maintaining an Oracle database and EMC data network would be fully supported by the services.

A solid product road map backed by a financially stable vendor is a must, and IBM has proven its prowess as it remains a consistently profitable supplier and the only vendor that is growing its share in the UNIX marketplace. The POWER architecture is well established and is the Industry Standard 64-bit architecture for servers. This is in sharp contrast to other 64-bit solutions such as Itanium and Opteron that have a limited number of suppliers or maintain a niche market position. Additionally, Big Blue has maintained consistent broad-based support for Linux, unlike most of the competition, and supports Windows on its System x and i5 solutions.

In today's marketplace, no single vendor can provide all the pieces of a state-of-the-art IT solution. The value of partners and the greater ecosystem is paramount. IBM has 90,000+ business partners, with numerous developers and ISVs dependent on its platforms, and countless applications available on or accessible via those platforms. This strong endorsement of the ecosystem and level of partner support and interaction is unparalleled in the industry. But most important is that these ecosystem players develop and deliver the value that customers have come to expect from state-of-the-art IT solutions.

One other consideration, which is too often overlooked until the last moment, is whether solutions can be financed in a fashion that matches the ROI or value delivered from their purchase with the capital expended to bring them inhouse. IBM's financing options provide customers a variety of purchasing plans that can maximise the alignment of ROI with expenditure while enabling strategic investments that maximise the long-term benefit to the customer that might not otherwise be within their reach using traditional approaches to purchasing.

Summary

Whether the need is for Industry Standard servers based upon the Intel x86 architecture, flexible and highly scalable RISC based solution, or the highest degree of performance and integrity afforded by the mainframe, the IBM Systems family of servers provides the broadest choice of platforms in the market today. Beyond the hardware is the operating system support and partner ecosystem that include thousands of ISVs, hundreds of Integrators and VARs, as well as a legion of developers and other business partners. Collectively these participants offer vertically specific solutions that provide organisations demonstrable business as well as horizontally focused solutions that deliver a simplified IT infrastructure with reduced operating cost and sustainable competitive advantage. Combined with IBM professional services and financing options, the company is well positioned to deliver unique and innovative solutions to meet the needs of IT customers of most any stripe.