STAFFING IN A SUB-2000 MIPS ENVIRONMENT

GLOBAL TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS GROUP

MAINFRAME MANAGED SERVICES

MAINFRAME WILL BE A KEY BUSINESS ASSET OVER THE NEXT DECADE.

THE THREE SPECIAL CHALLENGES OF THE SMALL MAINFRAME

Efficiently staffing the zSeries environment is difficult enough, but customers in a sub-2000 MIPS environment have a special set of challenges when it comes to running a cost-optimized operation.

The future of the mainframe: In many cases, these customers have announced, or otherwise made clear, that the mainframe is to be sunset at some future date.

Rarely are capacity upgrades in the forecast for a mainframe on the brink of being sunset, and there certainly aren't resources to devote to the basics of performance, capacity of workload management.

These customers are often not at a currently supported level of hardware; rather, they are more likely with hardware approaching end of support.

Their **negotiating leverage** is (proportionally) lower with software vendors, because they cannot mount a credible story for changing out tools in a sunset environment – and even if so, quite often don't have the staff to execute such a project.

The staff: As a result of the plans for the mainframe, there has likely been retirement and other cause attrition; what was once a staff of 6-7 has dwindled to 4 or fewer. This remaining staff is frequently harried because there's not enough of them to share the burden.

HOW DO WE HELP?

When someone calls us with this sort of problem- the one known as the "we're a small shop, we can't invest, but we can't continue like this either" – we take a structured, consultative and cost-sensitive approach, adjusted to address the most urgent pain point. Leveraging a fractional resource solution model, we right-size the skill and hours required to support the customer – in many cases allowing them to achieve pre-sunset capabilities with post-sunset staffing levels.

GET MORE FROM THE HARDWARE YOU HAVE

We routinely strive to help our customers do more work with the same or less physical hardware. Doing so means that we have to identify ways we might eliminate or reduce the consumption patterns of jobs, schedules, transactions and queries. "Tuning" is a term commonly used to describe this process; it is MIPS elimination/reduction –plain and simple.

In tandem with tuning, we prioritize your workloads so we can deliver computing resources where they are needed to meet SLAs and business needs. Almost always overlooked, this Workload Management effort is critical if you want to avoid unnecessary processor upgrades.

Finally, we model future computing resource requirements based upon historical consumption, achievement of SLAs, business forecasts, the effects of the tuning work, and anticipated business events.

Nothing is worse than having to brute-force a capacity upgrade and deal with all of the fallout of software licensing, board proposals, etc. that go along with an unexpected expenditure that has a few zeroes behind it. These work efforts are important enough that, when we manage someone's mainframe environment, we accept this responsibility willingly as part of the relationship.

"VALUE ENGINEER" YOUR SOFTWARE PROFILE

Value engineering is defined as a systematic method to improve the "value" of goods or products and services by using an examination of function. While our negotiating leverage in a small environment might not be the same as with a large customer, we do have some techniques at our disposal adapted from our standard methodology.

Step One: Eliminate tools used by a small audience. In a smaller shop, the entire audience may be small. So here we can begin by simply inventorying the tools that are under license and determining where the need no longer exists.

Step Two: Replace a product with an existing feature. z/OS has many tools now. We exploit all of its features in a cost-pressured environment. This involves training of the remaining team, but the payback is often substantial, and in actual fact may result in a simplification of their workday.

Step Three: Competitive product displacement. While your z Systems environment may be small, or even in sunset, in many cases you can see a three year horizon for the ongoing need for the tools. The major tooling vendors all have sellers who are incented to win competitively installed business and none of them want to lose your business to competition before the platform is sunset. The effort involved with putting your tooling out to bid, added to the cost of the training, may or may not result in a meaningful savings. But we will help you make that determination.

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STAFFING– THE DAYS OF 40 HOURS PER RESOURCE ARE GONE

Given the shrinking pool of mainframe experts, it is unusual that we are asked to reduce a percentage of the team, and we're never asked to reduce a small team. One place we can help is in looking at which skills are more effectively provided from a fractional resource pool when the last person with a given skill set leaves the firm.

In simple terms, this means that we right-size the skill with the number of hours that our customer and GTSG feel it will take to achieve the organization's goals. Gone are the days of "1 resource equals 40 hours per week"–that's history. We base allocated hours on what you need – when you need it.

The other thing we do is contract to a gradual decrease in monthly charges relative to the workload being moved off the mainframe. It's not perfectly linear all the time ... but it's directionally correct.

We have a more detailed post on this as well.

We hope this helps. If you would like to talk further, please call us at 877.467.9885 or email us at mainframe@GTSG.com. Thanks.