

A Letter to the Editor

Re: IBM's Pathetic Marketing of TPF

It has long been my opinion that -- in a certain context -- TPF is the second-biggest mistake IBM ever made. The biggest, of course, was the original DOS licensing agreement with Microsoft. I say this because TPF does not help IBM sell hardware as well as CICS, OS390, etc. It's too efficient. If IBM sells less hardware, they also sell less software licenses.

Imagine SABRE or APOLLO running on CICS. Does that sound nuts? Crazy or not it could be done easily with CICS or OS390 or ZENIX or whatever. All it would require is a LOT more processors and their corresponding software licenses and maintenance agreements. IBM is a business, not a charity.

TPF allows customers to spend less money (we are always bragging that TPF provides the lowest cost per transaction). Why would IBM want help their customers spend less? I would like anyone who thinks TPF cannot be replaced by huge hardware deployments to visit AOL headquarters. They use small (by mainframe terms) computers running UNIX with all its inefficiencies and they provide three-second response time most of the time across the Internet no less. They do it with literally thousands of these "Mighty Mouse" computers.

We TPFers know that our system is the best transaction processing system. I am not saying that AOL and others are on the right track. I am saying they can deliver service by throwing more hardware at every increase in demand. They pass the cost to their users and their advertisers, and they have enough money left over to buy Time-Warner.

We also know that IBM's intentional foot-dragging for the last twenty years or so has kept us out of the third-party software market. The companies that write software may take many times longer than TPFers to develop a product if they want to. Once they are finally ready, they put their product on the market and sell it to their clients as a tool to achieve "faster time to market". It may seem absurd to us, but the customers only see the time it takes them to open the box and insert the CD. That is faster from their point of view.

I think the TPF crew in Poughkeepsie are doing the best they can under trying circumstances. They are, in my opinion, the 'orphan' department in IBM. I remember a comment made at a TPFUG which went something like "IBM has thousands of MVS licenses but only a hundred or so TPF licenses..." The implication is that IBM would naturally give more attention (and budget) to the bigger department. The irony of that is the fact that IBM has intentionally kept the TPF market share as small as possible. That allows them to disguise the problem as an excuse.

To further express my paranoid point of view, I also believe IBM's recent (last five years) addition of UNIX-like features to TPF were not created to extend the life of their least-money-making product. Rather, they are providing the elements needed to gradually convert the treasure trove of TPF applications to portable languages, so they can port them OUT of TPF.

That's my view of the problem. I have no solution to suggest. David and Goliath was just a fable.

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