

Migration experts offer users transition alternatives

Check this out. It's 2012 and the new system is running flawlessly. Detailed plans and budgets took a lot of effort to put together. But the benefits are now clear for all to see. Efficiency is up and costs are down. Future growth is now supported without placing an undue burden on the existing infrastructure.

Some legacy MPE/iX applications are still running niche-manufacturing processes, although work is now well underway to roll most of that functionality into newer packaged applications. Sophisticated emulation tools help cope with some of the trickier code. The plan over the long term, however, is to have everything running natively. Future IT support resources will thereby be easier to find. Ongoing licensing costs can also be reduced. Budgets have been met. Functionality has improved. And hardware investments are fully protected.

Now turn the clock back a few years to 2009. Several HP Platinum Partners are playing a vital role in providing expert advice or helping companies overcome their resource constraints and migrate HP3000 environments to current platforms. All are pointing to the 'here and now' as the best time to start the migration process in order to avoid the last minute crunch.

"For medium and small businesses the migration itself is going to take about 18 months depending on the complexity of the environment and how many applications they have running," says Birket Foster, chairman and founder of MB Foster based in Ontario, Canada. "That doesn't leave a lot of wiggle room at the end if the process keeps getting delayed and so it's very important to start getting the budget in place and then start walking through some of the initial discovery and inventory steps." The budget, he adds, includes an allocation of financial resources and a complete planning process that includes compiling and inventory of all existing systems and applications, building a detailed application plan to meet future business needs, and developing a data blueprint incorporating the appropriate file types and databases on the existing HP 3000 platform.

Migration is a business issue

"You really need to get the right processes in place and recognize this as a business issue rather than just a technology problem," Foster adds. "In many cases I think we're seeing that resource constraints mean that companies are now basically flying the plane in maintenance mode and what they really need now are some expert pilots to help them change course."

MB Foster is one of four Platinum Partners currently

working with HP to help customers create and execute an HP 3000 migration plan. Each Partner provides a wealth of experience in the market, a wide assortment of migration services and sophisticated tools for migrating data, coping with code nuances unique to the MPE/iX environment, or simplifying the process and migrating code to the new platform. The goal? Help customers migrate to current HP-UX, Windows or Linux environments either before or shortly after the end of 2010 when support for the aging platform is slated to end. HP announced at the end of 2005 that the rapidly shrinking third-party tools and services ecosystem around the HP 3000 platform no longer made it practical to continue selling or supporting the systems. Sales are pegged to end late next year.

HP's support and transition resources

"We'll be providing whatever is needed for customers to run their businesses right up to the 2010 deadline," says Alvina Nishimoto, HP's HP 3000 migration center manager. "Our role right now is essentially to provide the needed resources for our partners to figure out what's available for customers and how we can help them, ensuring a smooth transition." Transition assistance, she adds, includes a wide range of promotions, Web-based training, and conversion kits. The company recently announced several promotions, including a six-month free HP-UX loaner program for all qualified HP 3000 customers wanting to start their migration. "We do expect to have some additional releases on the HP 3000 front to keep the platform viable until its discontinuance," Nishimoto adds. "Certifying newer peripherals is one area of focus to retain platform liability." All these initiatives add up to a transition strategy that enables business continuity while protecting investments made during the transition phases.

The four HP Platinum Partners all emphasize the importance of proper planning. Lund Performance Solutions, for example, follows a five-step plan, with the first two stages allocated to crafting baselines and developing a project plan. "We think the migration from MPE is a perfect opportunity for customers to implement the appropriate planning methodologies and documentation procedures in much the same way that a lot of companies used Y2K projects to really get their houses in order," says Scott Pierson, president of the Albany, OR-based company. "The other side of the equation is that companies can take this opportunity to really look at their business processes."

A step-by-step approach to migration

The first step in any migration normally involves an

analysis of business requirements to help project managers clearly define and communicate the goals of the project to all members of the transition team. Cost and risk analysis efforts then provide stakeholders with a clear understanding of their options and those best suited to meet their current and future needs. Most transition projects involve replacing currently used HP 3000 systems with new servers. Supporting them may require a different set of technical skills. Businesses will therefore need to evaluate and measure their in-house technical skills, survey individual technical capabilities, determine current overall resource skill levels, and decide what training or re-hiring will be necessary to ensure the success of the transition project.

A technical assessment of the current HP 3000 environment and a portfolio of solutions will allow the project team to determine the transition project's technical requirements. HP provides an automated system inventory utility (SIU) tool to help with the technical baseline assessment. Overall performance of the current system can then be measured and the baseline results used to configure and tune the transition solution on the target platform.

The next step in the migration will likely involve identifying any Independent Software Vendor (ISV) solution currently in use and determining the vendor's plans to transition their solution to other platforms. Transition options for each application can then be assessed. These options include replacing current applications with a shrink-wrapped solution, using emulation technology, translating it, re-writing the existing e-3000 application to run on the target platform, leaving it in place if the function will no longer be needed after 2010, or a combination of each.

"Going with the packaged application route might be a good strategy for many businesses but we certainly recommend that they do it with their eyes wide open," says Christopher Koppe, director of marketing at Speedware Corporation, based in Montreal, Canada. "It's really important not to overestimate what you're going to get or underestimate what that approach will cost in terms of resources." Koppe points out that for many businesses with 4GL applications, the trickiest component of the migration exercise will likely involve database porting. "Dirty" data from the MPE/iX environment needs to be identified and properly formatted for a relational database environment, and file structures will also need to be changed. Speedware offers a utility called Dbmotion to help HP e3000 customers migrate their TurboIMAGE, KSAM and

flat file databases to Oracle or SQL Server in HP-UX or Windows environments.

Build, buy, port or stay?

So what are the other considerations for HP 3000 migrations? Each of the Platinum Partners notes that customer options for each application will include a choice to build, buy, port or stay. "Stay is really just a delay because eventually you will have to get off there," says Frank Calvillo, business development director at Managed Business Solutions in Fort Collins, Colorado. "If businesses want to go through that phase then the big thing is to make sure that the current system is stabilized and fortified with the latest operating system updates and hardware components. It's a bit risky but in some cases it might make sense to leave an application where it is if it's not as mission critical as some of the others and then just gradually get the newer systems to take over its tasks." Managed Business Solutions uses a seven-step plan to help customers develop an effective migration strategy. This includes the development of an application topology to understand high-level data flows between different systems and a review of application usage to determine any obsolete functionality that can be disposed of in order to reduce migration costs and complexities. "This migration is not going to be just a case of saying let's pick up this code and drop it onto the new platform," Calvillo adds. "It's more a case of let's sit down and think about what our business objectives are for the next ten years and build an IT strategy around it that makes sense over the long term."

One central technology choice most businesses will need to make is whether to re-write, translate or emulate their code on the new platform. If no shrink-wrapped replacement for an e3000 application can be found, then one alternative is to develop a custom replacement. Translation is the other migration option. Customers who choose to translate their code can use a variety of tools to perform tasks such as replacing MPE/iX intrinsics with commands that the UNIX environment understands. With translation, there is no need to emulate the HP 3000 environment on the target platform — and therefore no need to pay license fees for the emulator. Also, because a properly translated application interacts directly with native components of the target platform, it can usually provide better performance than the emulated solution.

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