



# Linux + mainframe + integration: a formula for success?

by Mark Lillycrop

**If the lack of integration and support has been holding up Linux deployments in the data centre, IBM's recent Integrated Platform announcement is likely to kick-start the market.**

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By any standards, IBM's progress in driving Linux up into the data centre environment has been impressive. Although the Open Source operating system has been struggling to gain credibility as a base for real business-critical applications, a steady stream of enterprise-class customers have been implementing new systems under Linux, moving the focus away from simple Web server and file/print server deployment and towards core business systems.

The real Linux success story for IBM has been on the zSeries. Linux has given the mainframe a whole new lease of life, and IBM now boasts some 600 customers worldwide developing or running mainframe-based applications under Linux (out of a total of some 6300 IBM engagements involving Linux on all platforms). zSeries has provided the Linux world with a new level of performance and resilience, while the potential for hosting tens, hundreds, or even thousands of images under VM offers unprecedented scalability.

### **Addressing the support issue**

For users with the right in-house expertise and a clear vision for Linux, the zSeries has proved to be an ideal platform. Until now, though, the biggest obstacle to further deployment on the mainframe, particularly among smaller S/390 users and service providers, has been the lack of a single, cost-effective integrated solution incorporating all the tools needed to deploy new e-business applications with minimal technical support.

With its recent announcement of the eServer Integrated Platform for e-Business on zSeries, IBM has addressed this need for a load-and-go packaged approach to Linux development. The new product, originally known as 'Blue Ice', is the second stage of a cross-platform roll-out, the xSeries version having been announced in May 2002. The core components of the new



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mainframe version are:

### *Software*

- SeSE Linux Enterprise Server for S/390 and zSeries 7
- z/VM 4.3
- WebSphere Application Server AE 4.0.4
- IBM Directory Server (LDAP) 4.1
- One year of software support.

### *Hardware*

- An IFL (Integrated Facility for Linux) engine for an eServer z800 or z900, with one-year warranty
- OSA Express cards.

There are various memory options, additional support and financing services, and some key software add-ons such as DB2 Connect 7.2. Additionally, a number of partners have optimized their e-business tools to work in the new environment, including BMC with Patrol for WebSphere, Aptrix from Web content management company Presence Online, eOneCommerce from eOneGroup, and SecureZone 5 from Grey Zone.

Significantly, users can opt to take just the software components, priced separately; but the Integrated Platform is being positioned as a complete hardware/software/support package, with the all components pre-configured and tested together. Pricing is very aggressive indeed, and there's no doubt that IBM plans to push the package hard in the coming months.

### **Who are the target customers?**

IBM seems to be keeping an open mind on the prospective market for mainframe Blue Ice. Essentially this a product for anyone who wants to get business-critical Linux applications up and running quickly and cheaply, without specialist skills and without the added management complexity that often accompanies the addition of a new platform. Specifically, IBM has identified three groups within the potential zSeries customer base: enterprise users, adding new e-business apps to their existing infrastructure; mid-market customers, who are still looking at Web-enabling their existing systems; and service providers, aiming to make cost and service level improvements.



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The Integrated Platform will certainly find favour in the enterprise, where the high level of IBM support and stress testing will encourage users to move Linux more rapidly into a business-critical role. However, we expect the biggest impact to be at the mid-market level, where more 'static' S/390 users will be encouraged to take advantage of the benefits of the Linux environment without having to address management complexity or find additional skills. Moreover, as further versions of the Integrated Platform reach the market, for iSeries and pSeries users, we believe that the product will provide IBM and its partners with a unique opportunity to offer tightly integrated and managed Linux services across the enterprise, at a highly attractive price.

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