

## Platform Solutions' Mainframe Debut Is Noteworthy

**Mike Chuba, John R. Phelps, Dale Vecchio**

Platform Solutions Inc.'s (PSI's) mainframe offering will pique customer interest. But it still needs to prove itself on many points before it can be considered a viable alternative to IBM's zSeries.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

---

### Event

On 1 March 2005, start-up vendor PSI, a manufacturer of mainframes based on Intel Itanium processor technology, revealed it had installed its first IBM-compatible mainframe with an end user, L.L. Bean. The company claims its mainframe is the first system capable of simultaneously running z/OS (the 64-bit operating system for IBM's zSeries mainframe servers), Linux, Windows and Unix.

### Analysis

Choices in the IBM mainframe world have been severely restricted since Amdahl and Hitachi opted to not follow IBM into the 64-bit architecture world in 2001. Smaller mainframe customers in particular have been challenged during this time, as they have not been the primary focus of IBM's development and marketing efforts. These customers have been limited to staying with older, unsupported IBM systems, moving to new IBM systems (at higher costs), employing Fundamental Software's Flex-ES emulation alternative for the mainframe or migrating from mainframes to the Unix or Windows platforms.

PSI's plans to develop a new generation of plug-compatible mainframes (based on technology it acquired from Amdahl) have sparked much curiosity. But it is still too early to consider its system a viable alternative to IBM's zSeries. PSI still must address many issues, including:

- Demonstrating full-function support infrastructure
- Establishing hardware performance (such as specifying a high-end limit), mainframe reliability and IBM-compatibility credibility
- Qualifying for IBM's most-favorable software pricing algorithms

Moreover, when viewed strictly as a plug-compatible alternative, PSI still must wrestle with industry concerns about future mainframe viability, most notably:

- Total cost of ownership (particularly software costs)
- Application portfolio
- Agility
- Availability of mainframe operational and development personnel

While large mainframe customers may consider PSI's offering an expedient avenue to create bidding leverage with IBM, we believe the most likely candidates for early installations will be smaller, back-level customers (running likely less than 200 million instructions per second), possibly still running on older Amdahl equipment. This system's reported ability to run multiple operating systems might eventually make it a platform for those transitioning from traditional mainframe application paradigms to more-modern architectures.

**Recommendation:** Mainframe customers on unsupported platforms, or those considering migrating, should evaluate PSI for progress as it moves toward making the new system generally available.

**Analytical Sources:** Mike Chuba, John Phelps and Dale Vecchio, Gartner Research

## Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Survey Results Reveal Perceived Role and Use of the IBM Mainframe" — Many of the customers we have spoken to about leaving the IBM mainframe platform fit the profile of smaller mainframe environments. **By Mike Chuba**
- "IBM zSeries Announcements Pursue Mainframe Charter Framework" — IBM wants to counter the market perception that the mainframe's time is past by stressing that it continues to invest heavily in the zSeries platform. **By Mike Chuba and John Phelps**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access the documents referenced in this First Take.)

## REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS

---

Corporate Headquarters  
56 Top Gallant Road  
Stamford, CT 06902-7700  
U.S.A.  
+1 203 964 0069

European Headquarters  
Tamesis  
The Glanty  
Egham  
Surrey, TW20 9AW  
UNITED KINGDOM  
+44 1784 431611

Asia/Pacific Headquarters  
Level 7, 40 Miller Street  
North Sydney  
New South Wales 2060  
AUSTRALIA  
+61 2 9459 4600

Latin America Headquarters  
Av. Nacões Unidas 12.551  
9 andar — WTC  
04578-903 Sao Paulo SP  
BRAZIL  
+55 11 3443 1509