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Will iSeries Get HP Customers to Jump Ship?

by [Jill R. Aitoro](#) Industry Reporter

February 26, 2002 — Hewlett-Packard's disenfranchised customers look like easy pickings to the iSeries camp. HP's decision last November to scrap its proprietary hp e3000 platform leaves its devoted users wondering where to turn, and Rochester plans to draw many of them to the comfortable bosom of the iSeries. But will the iSeries' bells and whistles be enough to persuade hp e3000 customers to jump from one proprietary midrange system to another?

Despite HP's efforts to draw new applications to the platform and kick-start existing ones, the "ecosystem surrounding the hp e3000" was stifling any chance of the platform's survival, says Christine Martino, HP's worldwide marketing manager for hp e3000 servers. Last November, HP announced that it would end support of the hp e3000 and its MPE/iX operating system, giving customers 5 years to transition to new technology. "Customers and vendors are choosing open systems because they are looking for more standards-based solutions," Martino says. "This decision was based on sweeping industry trends. It was up to [HP] to tell customers that the future of the e3000 didn't look so bright."

Whether or not the decision was in their best interest, many hp e3000 customers weren't thrilled to hear HP was throwing in the towel on their beloved platform. According to a survey released by Interex, an independent HP user group, 67 percent of hp e3000 users don't support the decision to put the platform to rest. And — of particular interest to Big Blue — 16 percent said they plan to migrate to non-HP platforms, with 29 percent still undecided.

"The brand loyalty [to HP] has been severely, perhaps irreparably, damaged by HP's decision to drop support of the hp e3000," says John Clogg, an hp e3000 system administrator. Amid the rantings of disgruntled hp e3000 users since HP's announcement, he says, the iSeries is often cited as a machine

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that serves a similar market niche and that is still actively supported and marketed by its vendor. “In other words,” he says, “many in the hp e3000 market have already noted the appropriateness of IBM's targeting of this market.”

The iSeries and the hp e3000 have much in common. Both platforms grew up at about the same time targeting the same small and mid-sized customers, both were designed as business computers, both were I/O-intensive machines that started with proprietary hardware and operating systems, and both won loyal fans. When many small and mid-sized companies were first deciding which platform would run their businesses, the decision was often a tossup between the hp e3000 and the AS/400.

Now HP's abandonment of the hp e3000 leaves those who opted for the HP platform in a bit of a quandary — and could lead them to reexamine Big Blue's alternative. “[IBM] believes it has a chance to bring those customers to the iSeries,” says Frank Soltis, IBM's iSeries chief scientist.

But customers faced with a harrowing, forced exodus from their platform of choice may not be too keen to take their chances with another proprietary platform, says [Solomon Smith Barney](#) analyst Richard Gardner — particularly since some may view the hp e3000's demise as a bad omen. “The argument that customers will automatically move to another proprietary platform instead of using the opportunity to move to a less costly, more ‘open’ system [seems] wishful thinking,” Gardner says.

In fact, in a Webcast to hp e3000 customers, HP said that the future of all proprietary operating systems — and the Webcast specifically mentioned IBM's OS/400 — was looking pretty bleak. Like the hp e3000, the iSeries has faced speculation over the years that it was doomed to extinction because of its closed, proprietary nature.

But while the hp e3000 did little to reinvent itself during its 10-year run, the AS/400 developed far beyond the simple business computer it was in its earliest days, says Brad Day, an analyst with Giga Information Group. The AS/400 morphed into the “Swiss army knife” of midrange platforms, he says — able to run Linux, Unix, OS/400, and Windows, while maintaining its roots as a business-oriented machine. “The iSeries is moving in every direction that commercial transactional systems are going,” Day says. “The iSeries could take [hp e3000 users] to a much higher level of performance and scalability, with far more complex applications. [It's] truly a top-to-bottom enterprise architecture. Being able to run an e-commerce application on Linux at the front end and have serious database performance scaling,” for example, “are [capabilities] hp e3000 users aren't used to.”

And according to hp e3000 users, HP was no better at marketing the machine than at keeping it competitive. The issues leading to the product's demise were compounded by a decade of ineffective marketing, Clogg says. “Many of

the sales reps and marketing folks seem to have forgotten that the hp e3000 exists, preferring to pitch the HP-UX and NT servers,” he says. The iSeries community may gripe about Big Blue’s ineffectual promotion of the iSeries, but Clogg says that IBM’s marketing and support are often cited as examples of what HP should have done. “The general feeling in the community seems to be that the hp e3000 needn’t have died if HP had really tried to keep it alive,” he says.

In addition to recognizing the iSeries’ progress over the years, Big Blue hopes the estimated 30,000 hp e3000 users will relate to the zealous loyalty iSeries users have for the platform. Already, [COMMON](#) has extended a warm welcome to the board of Interex in the form of official invites to attend the next COMMON conference in Nashville — which COMMON president Charlie Massoglia says will include iSeries sessions from an hp e3000 perspective.

But HP customers will likely be looking for the easiest transition, rather than the closest-knit user community, says Gartner Dataquest analyst Jeff Hewitt. “HP knows those users more intimately than IBM and should be able to provide them with a transition plan that makes sense,” he says. HP’s plan for hp e3000 customers includes packaged offerings to help them affordably move to HP’s Unix and Intel platforms.

But one of the most important points to consider during the transition is whether the software offered on the new platform compares to that offered on the old, Gardner says.

Knowing that, Rochester is trying to round up hp e3000 software partners to join the iSeries fold. Already, IBM has announced a partnership with software vendor [Sector7](#), which “has a very long and stellar track record in the full migration of applications from one operating environment to another,” Day says. “The fact that IBM has formed a partnership with Sector7 means it’s taking the initiative to offer a viable means of migration for [hp e3000] users.”

Until now, Sector7 specialized in migrations to Unix and Windows platforms, but support and services for full migration from the hp e3000 to the iSeries will be available soon, says Sector7 general manager Kevin Galloway.

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