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Let market decide about mainframes

Published: October 16 2009 03:00 | Last updated: October 16 2009 03:00

From Mr Ed Black.

Sir, Your editorial “**Big Blue’s dinosaur**” (October 12) misses two critical points. First, the mainframe remains a vital component in the modern data centre because of the huge amounts of legacy workloads – complex, interdependent or customised applications accessing decades of accumulated data – still in use by institutional customers. Eighty per cent of corporate data remains locked on the mainframe, including critical data from all 25 of the world’s 25 largest banks. Even more alarmingly, IBM’s exclusionary conduct has left its mainframe as the only platform capable of running legacy workloads alongside new workloads. The danger this presents is plain: with governments beginning unprecedented IT modernisation efforts, IBM seeks to perpetuate its grip on locked-in customers and tip emerging cloud-based data centres toward its mainframes.

Second, legacy customers do not have the ability to choose or switch to new technologies. Only the simplest and smallest workloads can easily be migrated to alternative platforms because IBM has prevented technologies from emerging to enable cost-effective and reliable migration. IBM has acknowledged that migration is “prohibitively expensive” and “neither practical nor realistically accomplishable in a reasonable time frame”. The result, according to IBM, is that “after 20 years, and billions of dollars wasted on trying to migrate applications from mainframes, the largest and most robust enterprises continue to depend heavily on the mainframe”.

The Computer Communications Industry Association seeks only to stop IBM’s efforts to block competition from new technology and innovation that could provide customers with choice. The mainframe’s reliance on customer lock-in should not insulate it from competition from more recently evolved species of computing platforms. The market, rather than IBM alone, should decide whether the mainframe is a “dinosaur”.

Ed Black,
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