

Re: SGI files for chapter 11

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In article <4c9mm2F14tvo9U1@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>, bill@xxxxxxxx (Bill Gunshannon) writes:

Sun/IBM/The tooth Fairy are not going to buy OpenVMS and port it to anything.

HP are highly unlikely to port it to x86.

How do you know that?

Well, people have been screaming for it for sometime now (not sure when Dave started his call for it, but he can chime in here if he wants) and for an equally long period of time the VMS engineers that hang out here have been telling us there are no plans to do so. Sounds "highly unlikely" to me.

I doubt all the screaming in the world on c.o.v. is going to have any impact on HP.

The VMS engineers don't make the plans to port, they implement them when the suits tell them to. A number of years ago I speculated in this ng that Compaq (as it was at the time) would be smart to have contingency plans in place to port VMS to another architecture since Alpha wasn't doing too well in the market (deja vu anyone?). Clair Grant (forget what his title was, but he was in OpenVMS management) shot me down saying that until the day that management told them to do a port they wouldn't waste any time thinking about it. Of course the port turned out to be to IA64, not X86, but beyond that everything fits, the orders came – the job was done.

Presumably they still believe (rightly or wrongly) that IA64 is

Re: SGI files for chapter 11

a better choice, but one has to believe that with each port to a different processor the subsequent port becomes easier.

One is free to believe that, but I am not sure it makes it true. Any of the VMS engineers want to answer that one?

Let me clarify, "they" is HP management, not engineering. HP presumably still believes IA64 can succeed as they continue to put money into it – they're not going to damage that effort by condoning a port of VMS to X86 until (if and when) they may change their views there.

If there are sufficient customers who let HP know that VMS is the only reason they are HP customers and if IA64 proves to not be viable then porting VMS to x86 would be a good business decision.

Say what? Marketing the hell out of VMS would be "a good business decision".

Would it? Many folks have argued that point – it's not clear to me that all the marketing in the world would significantly increase VMS's market share. I don't want to see it happen but it sure looks like the computing world is rushing headlong towards a Windows monoculture, with everything else just surviving on the fringes (despite all its hype I'd include Linux as a "fringe" OS as well).

That doesn't mean that HP can't still make a profit out of the fringe element that wants to use VMS, but of course they can't do that if nobody can buy a machine that runs it. I suppose an alternative to a port may be using an Alpha emulator that runs on X86, but one would still want HP to officially support that and continue developing VMS.

Do you see it happening? Sometimes ego is more important than stockholders investments. Admitting that backing Itanium was a mistake would be a big hit in some people's egos. (Who was the exec at Bendix who said he would bankrupt the company before he would let anyone take it over?)

That's always a possibility, one can only hope clearer heads will prevail should that become the case.

I have every confidence the good folks in VMS engineering would have no great

Re: SGI files for chapter 11

difficulty doing this port if asked.

While I have no doubt that the VMS engineers are a rather remarkable collection of Computer Scientists, I would not go so far as to say they "would have no great difficulty" doing the port. For a long time people ran around saying VMS would not run on x86. If that was true, not enough has changed to actually make a port easy.

I don't know, perhaps some of them could comment (though I suspect they're sick of the issue and don't want to add new fuel to it). I wonder if some of those "insurmountable" problems had to be solved to get the IA64 port to work. I have to admit that while I had a good understanding of what went on under the hood of a VAX I haven't spent any time investigating Alpha, IA64 or X86 to that level and honestly don't know if there are any inherent architectural issues.

Will SGI going into Chapter 11 be the death of VMS, as Andrew would have us believe? I don't know, it might – but it's also possible that it will have no effect on VMS at all, or even that it will be the nudge that convinces HP to examine VMS ports to other platforms.

The only certainty is that if one chooses to believe FUD it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.