

CAMUS Web Meeting Nov 11, 2010

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November 11, 2010

OpenMPE resource revives source server

The CAMUS manufacturing user group held a phone conference meeting today, an event I chronicled at the offices of the Support Group inc here in Austin. The one-hour confab of questions and presentations was well worth the time spent, and you should sign up for the next meeting this legacy group schedules in the spring.

But I spent a much shorter amount of time at the TSG headquarters finding a legendary resource up and running once more. TSG has volunteered its datacenter as the host for the official Invent3k public access development server, something HP hosted for the community until the end of 2008. For close to two years Invent3k was dark, but starting this week the primary host burns with a light that may seem everlasting.

The server that's up and running, with a fresh master password, came from HP's labs by way of a Client Systems 3000 contribution. This Series 959 4-way arrived with HP's name for it labeled on the rear access panel. The yellow sticker reads MPESOURC. Those eight letters -- it's an MPE system, after all, and is so limited to those characters -- suggests to TSG's founder Terry Floyd that this is the HP Labs server where the 3000's source code once lived and grew.

Those millions of lines of code have been wiped off the 54GB of SureStore disk arrays attached to MPESOURC. HP shipped out major parts of that code to eight licensees this year, an accomplishment that OpenMPE takes a reasonable share of credit for sparking. But the whole MPE/iX enchilada once coursed through the same PA-RISC processors and memory which just started serving OpenMPE and its members. Another part of the day's news was an affordable offer to use Invent3k during 2011 and beyond.

Chairman Birket Foster used about 20 minutes of the meeting to update the OpenMPE membership offerings. Invent3k will be the first asset to generate money for the group, but access won't cost much more than the free trial membership of 2010. In 2011, a \$99 per year fee will get you access to working with Invent3k. (A [DR version of the system runs at Measurement Specialties' 3000 shop](#), managed by OpenMPE director Tracy Johnson.)

"You'll have an Invent3k box where you can log on and develop and test things," Foster said of the system maintained by TSG's David Floyd and Johnson. "You can use it to train, so in your succession plan you can show a person how to log on and manage an HP 3000, without affecting your own production machine," he offered as an example.

And the fact that Invent3k, fully patched up on the 7.5 level of MPE/iX, once housed the source code that drives the heartbeat of 3000s worldwide? If you've got any sense of history at all -- and many homesteaders do -- you might sign up for the \$99 plan just to tap the resources of the very same machine where MPE grew up into its ultimate version at HP.

OpenMPE's going to get a link to its PayPal account posted up at [its website](#) to collect these \$99 memberships. Before too long the user-built utilities of the Contributed Software Library, just arrived at the TSG datacenter this week, will also be online.

The hardware may be legacy-grade, and the software will remain stable and static. But those are benefits of working with a solution handed down from its creators to curators, for extend the use of the 3000 for the community.

November 15, 2010

Resources meet some 3000 training needs

One of the sharpest prodding-points that gets customers moving away from HP 3000s is brain drain. MB Foster's Birket Foster said it well at [last week's CAMUS user group meeting](#). "It's not the software, it's the wetware," he said of the departure of 3000-savvy IT pros. One such staffer at the City of Sparks, Nev. has been in the city's IT shop for 32 years, preserving the knowledge of in-house apps.

Even more basic knowledge of the 3000 can be needed today, too. How to log on, manage accounts, administer disk space (represented in sectors, rather than GB, for example) — all these have unique techniques. Finding a place to train new IT staff on your 3000, as well as guides to teach them in a few hours — both can be elusive.

Jack Connor of Abtech, who serves on the OpenMPE board of directors, needed this kind of class content in a hurry over the weekend. He was asked to give a day-long tutorial to "a group of operators that have never worked with MPE as they are outsourcing replacements. There used to be a Computer Based Training program on HP's site, but it's no longer there."

Connor was on the hunt for HP's basic "Here's a 3000 and here's how to drive it a little" info. "The set I remember started out with describing the accounting structure using file cabinets as accounts and drawers in the cabinet as groups, and so on."

Through the magic of the Web, Glenn Cole dug up [Understanding Your System Concept Guide for the HP 3000 Series 9X7LX](#). The eight chapters which include that filing cabinet tutorial are still online at HP's [docs.hp.com website](#). (It would be a good idea to download these pages to support your plan of succession for yourself — a vital component of sustaining a 3000 into the new year and beyond.) The fact that the training was written in the 1990s for MPE/iX 5.0 makes it no less fresh for teaching 3000 skills.

The place to train for these kinds of basics might be a crash-and-burn HP 3000 on your site, or on one from your garage. But if you're not that well stocked in 3000s, the new Invent3k server from OpenMPE would be an ideal place to practice with your new operators. You can sign up for an inexpensive 2011 OpenMPE membership at [the group's website](#).

There's even better, deeper training available to the community from the source of the latest 3000 training materials. Paul Edwards and his training partner, Frank Smith, "are the exclusive licensees of all of the HP MPE training materials. The [web page] you mention is in the Fundamentals class. I still do MPE training on-site. I refer you to my website, [www.peassoc.com](#) for details. There were two self training modules available from HP, too."

December 14, 2010

CAMUS user reports on emulator's value

The HP 3000 community is waiting on development and testing of its first PA-RISC hardware emulator. At a recent meeting of the [CAMUS user group for ERP applications](#), one member testified about the emulator's predecessor, Charon -- already working in Digital shops running the MANMAN app.

Tim Envy of Peer Systems said Charon "gives you better performance" than customers get under native OpenVMS hardware, "especially because of the IO dependency you get under Windows." Stromasys has reported that Windows will be the controlling environment for its Zelus emulator for the HP 3000. "The system sometimes delivers many multiples of performance improvement. You have more configuration capability on the Windows platform in terms of optimization. Solid state drives fit nicely into the Stromasys configuration for OpenVMS."

Envy added that Stromasys told him the release date of the Zelus product has been pushed back by a few months. The original plan had the emulator selling in the second half of 2011. The new date is during Q3 of next year, which might be a matter of few extra months. Stromasys has hired a product manager for Zelus, and the company is on the hunt for HP 3000 software vendors and customers who want to participate in the 2011 pilot and alpha testing.

The CAMUS group met via a conference call rather than gathering in person. Peer said that Charon is a very stable platform for OpenVMS applications, plus it adds options such as hosting a tape drive as a virtual device. The Charon product has the advantage of being developed by Stromasys' staff which worked on the Digital migration team in the 1990s. Stromasys founder Dr. Robert Boers has said HP's delivered the technical information to let his company create a product as strong as Charon.

Boers also said [in a recent newsletter](#) that the boom of 1980s enterprise systems is creating an ever-larger field of customers for companies like his, which sell "cross-platform virtualization" solutions.

"The phenomenal growth of the IT industry in the 1980's will soon create a surge in obsolescence," Boers writes in the newsletter. He spoke to "a group of people interested in how to replace older computer systems. "It was a surprise to many -- in spite of the convergence to the X86 architecture -- that the volume of legacy systems is still increasing."

In other words, legacy systems remain in production roles while customers look for ways to transfer their workloads to other hardware platforms. In the 3000 community there's been a lot of talk about how the Zelus emulator will arrive too late to survive in the homesteading marketplace. But Stromasys has been selling emulators for a decade now in the Digital marketplace, long after that vendor ceased production of early-generation VMS computers.

When the talk of emulators for the 3000 hardware first came up in 2002, the head of Strobe Data explained the extra longevity of any emulator in a market where platforms are dumped by their vendors. Willard West [said in our Q&A](#) that an emulator's business plan is designed to outlast even used hardware.

Our major competition has been the used market. We've out-survived that. Yes, we often lose sales opportunities to people buying in the (Digital) PDP-11 world. When people take those offline, they're often worthless. Eventually you will need used equipment fixed or repaired, and we expect to outlive that situation.

Strobe has since sidetracked its own HP 3000 PA-RISC project, leaving the market field open for Stromasys. But that decision was not based on prospective sales base. Strobe backed away because of a recession that was crimping its Digital emulator sales, and so tightening R&D funding for new products.

December 16, 2010

User advice: have a spare CPU board ready

At the most recent CAMUS online user group meeting, Terry Simpkins of Measurement Specialties shared advice about getting a 3000 CPU board configured by HP in a downtime crisis. Don't do it, he advised. You can be ready for this with a on-site spare, just like his worldwide manufacturing company does for its 3000s.

Regarding the change HP will do for a Time & Materials fee to copy an HPSUSAN number to fresh hardware, Simpkins said, "It baffles me about why anybody would get themselves into a situation where they had to react like that -- why they wouldn't have a spare processor board already set with their system name and SUSAN number sitting on the shelf. Unless, of course, you're paying Hewlett-Packard to provide your hardware support."

HP won't offer that kind of hardware support full-time in about two weeks. (Well, for much of the world, although the vendor wants to retain support business on a selective basis.) Simpkins said creating this kind of hot spare is an easy thing to do. "I wouldn't have anything to do with HP when I'd get my extra board set to my SUSAN number. They are not the only people in the world who can legally perform that service."

Measurement Specialties is a \$230 million company with operations in North America and China. It's not a firm that would fly under a legal radar just to have its 3000s supported independently.

Providers of this kind of service -- Independent Recovery Services (irs4hp.com) comes to mind, but other indie support companies do this, too -- "have been vetted by HP's lawyers," Simpkins said, "and have been given a clean bill of health. To my knowledge, they will not do something untoward. But if you're sitting there with an HP 3000 running with an HPSUSAN number and an CPUNAME, I can't understand why anybody would not have a spare CPU board sitting in their closet, ready for that eventuality."

It's interesting to note that Simpkins called the CPU failure an eventuality rather than a possibility. Every bit of hardware can fail, and even solid state portions of a 3000 have this somewhere in their future.

There's an important distinction to observe about the setting of an HPSUSAN number. Applying this ID to a non-3000 board doesn't sit well with HP, although there's nothing the vendor can do about this, either. IN the past, entire PA-RISC systems have been turned into MPE-ready servers when they were sold as HP-UX devices. That's not the same sort of configuration as being ready for a board failure on your 3000. The downtime for an in-house replacement is a fraction, of course, of an HP response under Time & Materials contracts.

Customers are interested in finding satisfied users of the IRS services. [Mark Landin](#), a 3000 system manager, posted this request on the HP 3000 newsgroup on Dec. 13.

I'd like to speak (voice, or by email) with anyone who's using a Capt Greb / IRS system in production. All such dialog to remain confidential.

The IRS solution, promoted by an engineer who calls himself Captain GREB, doesn't have public recommendations. But the solution is in use in the community, and Landin may find a manager willing to share experience with this alternative to HP support.