sageza

Instant Insight
May 2, 2006

z9 BC: A Mainframe for the Mid Tier

By Tony Lock

IBM has just announced details of the IBM System z9 BC. The new platform is designed with all of the key characteristics with which the mainframe is deservedly associated: namely reliability, security, availability, and flexible virtualization. In addition, it provides a new entry point and greatly increased upwards growth potential. The IBM System z9 supports the full range of speciality engines, operating systems, and system management tools to allow customers to dynamically allocate its resources in response to fluctuating business requirements.

Highlights of the announcement include:

- Same low entry point as existing z890 platform;
- 37% improvement in uniprocessor capacity on existing z890;
- Extensive granularity: seventy-three capacity settings;
- Improved security: configurable Crypto Express2 and CPAF enhancements;
- Enhanced availability capabilities;
- Up to eight PUs;
- On/Off Capacity on Demand for CPs and speciality engines (zAAP, IFLs, ICF, zIIP);
- Capacity Backup (CBU) for zAAP, IFLs, ICF, zIIP and CP;
- Wide-ranging connectivity enhancements including HiperSockets support of IPv6 and Ficon Express4;
- Supports Linux, z/OS.e, z/VSE, z/VM;
- Sub-capacity License Options.

Pricing/Availability

The z9 BC is scheduled to start shipping at the end of May 2006 and is being positioned by IBM to be the new entry point mainframe system.

Net/Net

The System z9 BC is being firmly positioned as the entry point mainframe with extensive, and highly flexible, upgrade capabilities. z9 BC offers a new start point for organizations looking to consolidate diverse applications onto a secure, highly available, and flexible mainframe. The System z9 BC brings down the entry cost for mainframe computing and IBM is making available an extensive range of financing options available to further enhance the attractiveness of the platform.

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a mainframe, the announcement of the new System z9 BC and its larger brother,

The Sageza Group, Inc.
32108 Alvarado Blvd #354
Union City, CA 94587
510·675·0700 fax 650·649·2302
London +44 (0) 20·7900·2819
Milan +39 02·9544·1646

the System z9 EC, provides readers and potential customers with a huge volume of detail. Indeed, the sheer versatility of the System z9 BC in terms of scalability and flexibility of configuration almost demands a vast catalogue of items and options. However, for organizations with complex business-critical applications, both those running in traditional database-driven / transaction-oriented environments and those with "new" J2EE workloads, the investment in time considering the IBM System z9 BC or EC could easily be repaid.

In addition to the System z9's standard processors, the new platforms will also have the complete existing suite of speciality engines available from day one. Speciality engines currently available include the System z9 Application Assist Processor (zAAP) for hosting J2EE workloads as well as the recently released z9 Integrated Information Processor (zIIP) to accelerate many DB2 based applications while minimizing the associated database license charges. The other speciality engines, the Integrated Facility for Linux (IFL) and ICFs, are also fully supported. Indeed it should be noted that the IBM System z9 BC and IBM System z9 EC are built on exactly the same architecture as all other existing System z9 platforms and therefore will likely benefit over time to developments made for the overall range of servers. With the System z9 BC IBM is also increasing the range of encryption offerings with the availability of the configurable Crypto Express2. Further, IBM has stated that it intends at some stage in the future to develop outboard data encryption.

Alongside the new mainframe's entry point comes a new, lower entry cost. It is also worth noting that the so-called speciality engines are also offered with lower pricing. zIIP, zAAP, IFL etc. on the z9 BC now carry a "list price" of $95,000, considerably down from prices previously offered on the z9 platform. Indeed, IBM has stated that it will be making considerable efforts to highlight the very wide range of financial offerings it can bring to bear to make the IBM System z9 even more affordable to its target mid-market customers. In fact IBM is recommending that organizations should actively seek out their System z9 sales personnel, whether they be IBM staff or those of one of the company's channel partners, to discuss what financial acquisition model would be most beneficial. Through its Global Finance organisation IBM is able to offer a wide range of financial offerings from which most potential customers should be able to find an appropriate means to acquire and operate their System z9 BC.

This is not a re-invention of the mainframe, but is instead another step in the Server z9's continuing development. It visibly represents IBM's continuing commitment to invest in extending the mainframe into new arenas. There is every likelihood that existing mainframe customers will welcome the System z9 BC and the more powerful System z9 EC. However, it is very clear that in order to promote the mainframe outside of the existing, and very loyal, customer base, IBM will need to make significant efforts to educate organizations on the modern mainframe. This is the case especially in the mid-tier sector of the market. There is no doubt that the System z9 BC has characteristics that will appeal to mid-market customers, especially with respect to the system's very high availability, performance, and security. The trick will be for IBM and its partner channel to convince new potential customers that the z9 BC really has been designed for them. The z9 BC's lower entry point and entry price coupled with its ability to meet the business needs of customers today deserves to be successful in attracting new customers to the mainframe. As the central hub of an integrated IT infrastructure, the IBM System z9 BC has much to recommend it as the host for business critical secure transaction processing and data management environments, especially as a consolidation platform.

The Sageza Group, Inc.
32108 Alvarado Blvd #354
Union City, CA 96587
510·675·0700 fax 650·649·2302
London +44 (0) 20·7900·2819
Milan +39 02·9544·1646