

THE NEXT, NEXT GENERATION OF MAINFRAMERS IS HERE



On April 7, 2024, we will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of the mainframe. It would take some pretty thick rose-colored glasses to not remember the many times the future of the mainframe was in doubt. We heard [Stewart Alsop's 1991 announcement](#) about the impending demise of the mainframe, but March 15, 1996 came and went, followed by further predictions of doom. The mainframe also survived Y2K and many other events, such as downsizing, rightsizing, and outsourcing.

For the first decade or so of my career, when I said I was a mainframe programmer, I would get one of two questions: "What is a mainframe?" or "Why on earth would you enter a dying field?"

Way back then, people, even those in the mainframe world, couldn't understand why a new generation would choose the mainframe. I did. It was a good choice. I'm still here to talk about it. And it's still a good choice. I'm excited about the future potential still left untapped.

From a viewpoint inside the mainframe world, it is easy to overlook the massive innovation and growth that has happened over 60 years. Some of that has been on the IBM® Z® platform, or "Z" as we call it now, and some in outside areas. Gone are the days of heading to the machine room to find the manual needed (on the rack of manuals) or chasing tapes escaping across the floor. Good riddance.

Thanks to Google and now, artificial intelligence (AI), we can get answers at our fingertips in a few seconds. Tapes are virtual. Who knows where the mainframe is actually located? While we may look back with nostalgia on the days of lifting floor tiles to find a loose wire, we can probably all agree our

time is better spent these days.

The challenges we face today are nothing that would have been foreseen 20 years ago. Everyone has a device in their hand that can send a transaction to the mainframe. Data is growing astronomically. Gasps were heard as we saw the first million-row table, then a billion rows, and then the first terabyte table. One thing is for certain, the data is continuing to grow, and the rate of growth is still unbelievable but true.

When I became a manager, I was given a book by management consultant [Peter Drucker](#). My key takeaways were that the customer must be the focal point of the business and, to provide what the customer needs, you have to take care of your team. As Agile development arrived and everyone talked about all the changes needed in management styles, I started finding blogs devoted to linking Drucker's principles to managing Agile teams effectively. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

People have changed, no doubt. No one would mistake an intern in 2024 for someone new in career in 1964, for many reasons. But with all the change in society, some things remain the same. Early career mainframers are brave, inquisitive, and persistent. The great news is that we do have a next, next generation of mainframers who are innovative and driven to make the most of the mainframe. In the same ways—and maybe different ways—that we have tapped into the potential to exploit the speed, security, and “wow” of the mainframe, they will surprise us with progress we can't even imagine today.

Here's to the next 60 years with a bright new generation of mainframers to pave the way!