NEWS

# French fight the death of OpenVMS

The HP operating system still plays a role in business but faces an uncertain future

**By Patrick Thibodeau** | Follow

Senior Editor, Computerworld JUL 29, 2014 7:30 AM PT

An OpenVMS user group in France has posted an "open letter" to Hewlett-Packard CEO Meg Whitman urging her to reconsider HP's decision to begin pulling support for the operating system.

The letter, written by OpenVMS consultant Gerard Calliet on behalf of user group HP-Interex France, explains the important role OpenVMS plays in running transportation systems, health services and even nuclear power plants in France.

"These software products are the result of decades of precise programming, inscribed in precise coding imperative for such functional necessities," Calliet wrote. "A majority of them use functions specific to OpenVMS and still run on OpenVMS, as these custom features are hard to find elsewhere."

The user group accuses HP of being unclear about its direction and creating confusion. "Not only are big companies anxious about functional risks and huge investments, they have also been immobilized by over a year of expectation," Calliet said in the letter.

HP was asked for its reaction to the open letter, but a response wasn't immediately available.

In 2013, HP said it would continue support for OpenVMS on its Integrity i2 Itanium servers "through at least the end of 2020." In January this year, HP revised its plans and said it would extend "mature product support without sustaining engineering" on the i2 servers at least through 2025. Support services that have sustaining engineering include the ability to create new patches as needed.

But a key issue, which was unchanged by the January announcement, was that HP

If HP does not validate a port to the Integrity i4, said Calliet in an email, users would have to buy old i2 Itanium systems, which won't have sufficient power.

The i2 servers have Tukwila quad-core processors with up to a 1.73GHz clock rate. The i4 servers have eight-core Poulson chips with clock rates of up to 2.53GHz.

OpenVMS does not get the public attention of HP-UX, Linux or Windows. The only people who know anything about OpenVMS systems are probably in IT departments. Business executives at many organizations may be unaware that the operating system is running their companies' critical business functions. This lack of knowledge hurts support for the system, increasing OpenVMS's vulnerability.

HP has had experience bringing an end to legacy systems, including its HP 3000 midrange systems, which featured a proprietary MPE operating system, and Tru64, a Unix operating system. Like OpenVMS, these systems were praised for their reliability and functionality.

As it brings support for OpenVMS to a close, HP may adjust dates and time frames to address user concerns, as was the case with its announcement in January, but the message will remain the same: Migrate.

Calliet said the extension to 2025 for some support does little to help OpenVMS users. "Because 10 years for some OpenVMS customers is tomorrow," he said, referring to the complexities of engineering a migration.

Wayne Sauer, the CEO of Parsec Group, an IT consulting firm with a large OpenVMS practice serving some 350 customers running 7,000 systems, said he "concurs wholeheartedly" with everything the French user group brought up in the letter, although he said OpenVMS is more profitable than the French user group made it out be.

In an interview, Sauer and Paul Williams, vice president of technical resources at Parsec, said HP has never come out and said that OpenVMS was facing end of life, but if the company doesn't port OpenVMS beyond the Integrity i2, the software's life span will be effectively limited.

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Sauer said OpenVMS users "are as rabid as ever in their devotion to OpenVMS," adding that big users of the operating system include healthcare companies, wireless carriers and lotteries.

OpenVMS was introduced as VAX/VMS in 1977 by Digital Equipment Corp., a company later acquired by Compaq, which in turn was acquired by HP.

In the letter to Whitman, Calliet wrote that HP failed to "comprehend the particularities of the OpenVMS market" and said the life cycle for the system is 10 or 20 years.

Calliet urged HP to reverse course and recognize that it is making a mistake with OpenVMS. It would bring no shame for HP to change direction, he said, adding, "The shame would be to not correct a bug when there is a bug."

This article, "_French Fight the Death of OpenVMS_," was originally published on Computerworld.com.

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