2010-11 Unix Survey: Role of Commercial Unix

The rise of commercial Unix systems coincided with – and fueled the rise of – the networked economy that began in earnest in the mid-1990s. At one point there were more than twelve vendor-supported Unix variants enjoying varying levels of market acceptance.

Economic forces like the cost of developing custom hardware and software, along with fighting for ISV attention and market share, winnowed down the market to three major players: HP, IBM, and Oracle. Competition from increasingly capable and less expensive x86-based systems pushed commercial Unix servers into a high-end, mission critical workload role.

Some in the industry press and pundit ranks seem to think that the commercial Unix market is irrelevant. We think they're overlooking a large segment of IT infrastructure – one that is critically important and still growing, albeit not as fast as x86-based systems. Dismissing Unix is like saying that the rapid sales growth of fuel-efficient cars makes SUVs and trucks useless dinosaurs, when in fact there is a need for the bigger rigs. Passenger cars aren't meant to be the perfect substitute for every transportation need.

In our **2010-11 GCG Unix Vendor Preference Survey,** we once again take a comprehensive look at how real-world customers are using commercial Unix platforms, how they're responding to the constantly changing business world, and what they see coming down the road.

In this year's version (methodology and demographics here), we asked our 306 Unix data center managers and workers to tell us about their IT infrastructure and the role that commercial Unix systems play. Are these systems still important and relevant? That's what we're asking in this first question below…

"Unix systems are strategic in our organization"

	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree
2008-09	7%	2%	91%
2010-11	7%	5%	89%
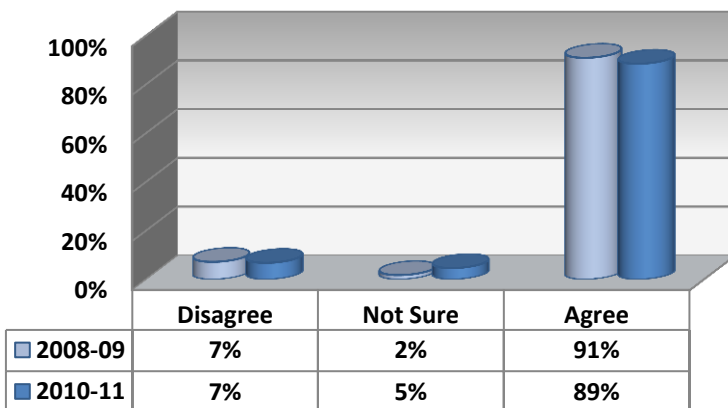
The vast majority view their commercial Unix systems as strategic platforms. These systems support core business processes that enable both basic and high-level functions. They often host the massive relational databases that sit behind web interfaces, invisible to most users. These systems have to provide predictable performance and high availability even when under extreme load.

So commercial Unix systems are regarded as strategic, but what does this really mean in terms of how they're being used in the data center? In this next question, we get more specific…

What proportion of your Unix workloads are mission critical?

	None	At least 25%	At least half	At least 75%	Virtually all
■ % Resp.	5%	16%	26%	25%	27%
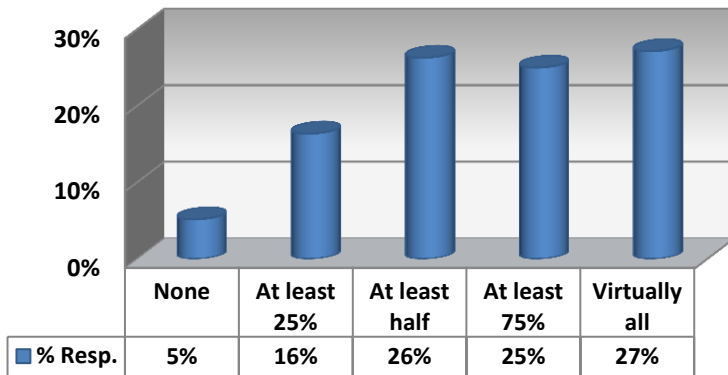
More than 50% of our respondents say that three-quarters of the apps on their Unix systems are mission critical. More than 80% say that half of their Unix workloads are critical.

While every application is 'mission critical' to someone, we're defining it as a function that's necessary for essential business operations.

We've seen that Unix systems are strategic, and that they're home for a large proportion of mission critical applications. But what does this mean in terms of the future of the platform in our respondents' data centers? Are their Unix infrastructures static or growing? And are they standardizing on a particular brand? We take a look at these questions in our next survey report, available here.

If you're interested in finding out more about this survey (demographics, expanded results, detailed GCG analysis), click here.

Gabriel
CONSULTING GROUP

www.GabrielConsultingGroup.com
gcginfo@GabrielConsultingGroup.com
(503) 372-9389