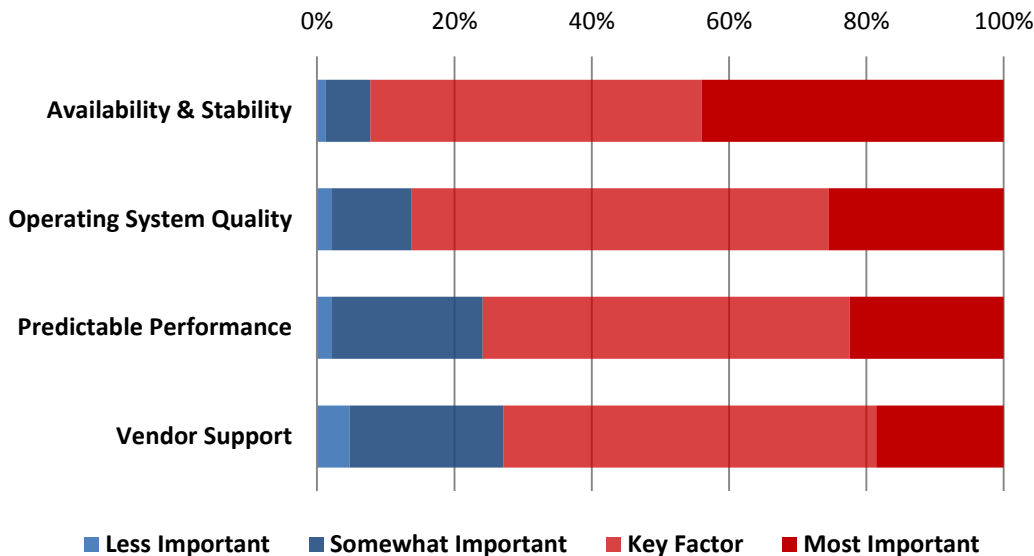


2010-11 Unix Survey: System Buying Criteria

In our annual Unix Vendor Preference surveys, we ask a lot of general questions about how enterprise data centers are dealing with business and IT challenges. We also, of course, ask quite a few specific questions about how respondents use commercial Unix systems and how they regard the major vendors (HP, IBM and Oracle).

In the 2010-11 edition of the survey (methodology & demographics [here](#)), we went even a bit deeper by asking our 306 enterprise respondents to tell us which factors are the most (and least) important in deciding which Unix system to purchase.

"When considering Unix systems, how important are the following factors in your decision?" (Top 4)



Given that the vast majority of customers use their Unix-based platforms to run mission critical apps (as we show [here](#)) it isn't surprising to see that equally large numbers rate 'Availability & Stability' as the #1 decision factor.

While 44% of respondents rate availability as their most important criteria, only 1% say it's 'less important'; an additional 6% say it's only somewhat important.

It also makes sense that operating system quality

comes in second on the list, since operating systems are key in ensuring a stable computing platform. We asked about other operating system-related characteristics (as you'll see in the chart on the following page) like administration/management and virtualization, but those factors scored lower than overall quality in the minds of our respondents.

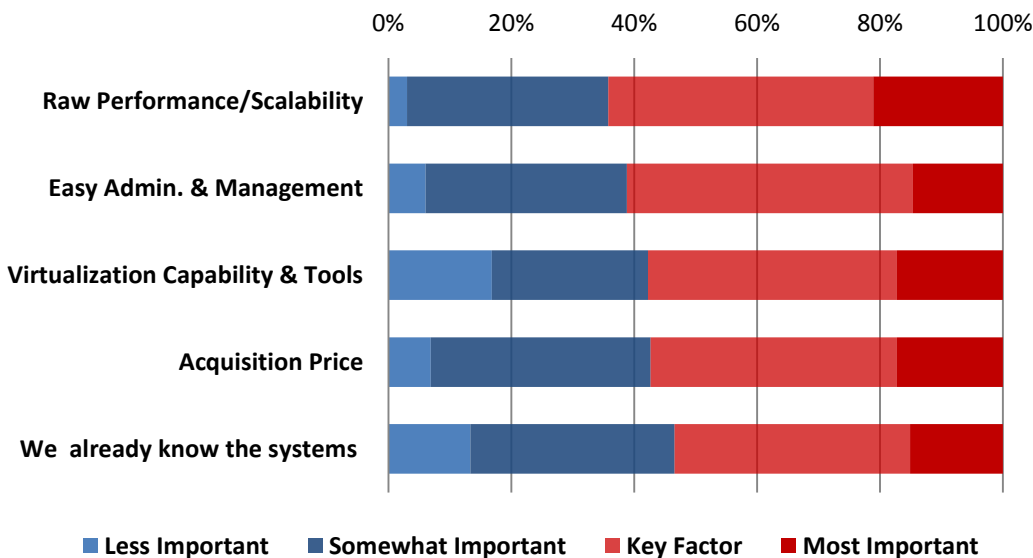
It's also interesting to see 'Predictable Performance' coming in third place. We gave them two performance-related factors to rate; the other choice was 'Raw Performance/Scalability', which came in fifth. This is a consistent pattern in our Unix surveys; customers value predictable performance somewhat higher than the ability to max out benchmarks.

'Vendor Support' also scores high with customers. With Unix systems morphing into a high-end strategic platform role, quality vendor support is more important than ever because the stakes are

higher. When a non-strategic system fails, that's a problem. But when there is trouble with this class of system, that's a big-time problem. Application or system failures on these servers can affect financial results for the company and even require a note on a 10-k or 10-q report. At the very least, someone will have a lot of explaining to do. It's always best to have a high-quality, responsive vendor support organization standing behind you – hopefully stopping these situations from happening in the first place.

It's important to note someplace (and here seems as good a place as any) that none of these factors are unimportant. They all carry some weight and are worthy of consideration. But some factors carry more weight than others, and that's what we're attempting to measure with this set of questions.

"When considering Unix systems, how important are the following factors in your decision?" (5th-9th place)



We round out our list with the chart at left, where we see 'Raw Performance' coming in as the fifth most important criteria.

We expected to see 'Easy Admin & Management' come in a bit higher on the list. Not first or second, but perhaps third or fourth. While more than 60% said it was a key or important factor, only 15% cited it as most important.

Virtualization capabilities are ranked seventh on the

list, which is probably about right given the importance of the factors that scored ahead of it.

It's interesting to see that purchase price doesn't play nearly as large a role as many might assume. The major reason that price is so far down the list is because these systems fulfill such a crucial role in the organization. When considering a purchase associated with a new installation, the cost of the hardware is often a small portion of the overall project price tag – as little as 10% in some cases, even though they're often \$1 million plus systems.

Another reason for price not being a major concern is that the competition between HP, IBM and Oracle is fierce. They are competing with each other and with lower-priced x86 systems. Because of this rivalry, the street price of these systems is much lower than the sticker price, although it will vary by the overall size of the deal and even the time of year. In an open field of competitive opportunity, the best and final system prices will usually be very comparable, even taking into account performance differences.

But it's the factor that customers saw as least important that really caught our attention. By rating 'We already know the systems' last, customers are taking 'legacy inertia' off the table as an important decision criteria. In other words, the fact that they're primarily a Solaris (or HP-UX or AIX) shop doesn't mean that they're going to give Solaris the thumbs up on the next system they buy. While they do give it some weight, it's not nearly as much as vendors might assume.

This could be because of the heterogeneous nature of modern data centers. 80% of our respondents are currently using at least two Unix brands and have had extensive experience with all three major brands. It's also true that while there are definitely differences between the mainline commercial Unix distributions, it's not like the difference between the Chinese and Italian languages; moving from one variant to another just isn't that big a deal to them.

As expected, Unix customer decisions are guided by their priorities. With these systems, the priority is providing a stable, reliable, and predictable system that just works. We see this reflected in the way users rated the various factors we put in front of them on the survey.

We explored a bit farther down this road in the next section of the survey: the respondents were presented with this exact same list of criteria and asked how much difference they perceive among the major brands on each factor. We've seen that system 'Availability & Stability' is most important to Unix customers. But do they think that there are big differences between the major vendors on this score? We asked the questions and are reporting the results in our [next installment](#).

You can find out more about this survey (demographics, expanded results, detailed GCG analysis), by clicking [here](#).



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