

2010-11 Survey: Unix Systems? What's the Difference?

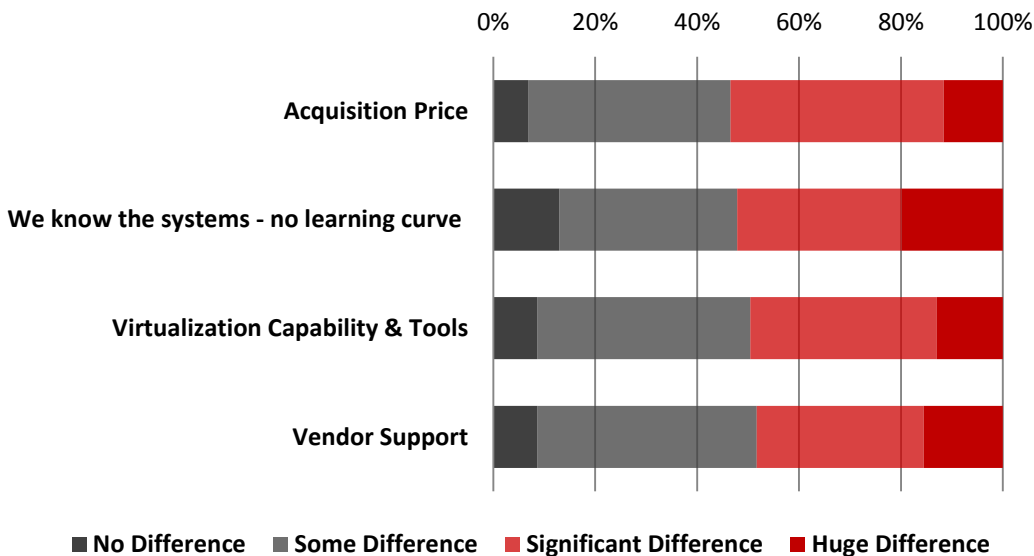
Our annual Unix Vendor Preference surveys are chock full of questions about how real-world customers are using technology to solve real-world problems. In addition to asking how they're dealing with universal IT challenges, we also ask a lot of specific questions about how they're using commercial Unix systems in their infrastructures – and what they think of the major vendors.

In this 2010-11 version of the survey (methodology & demographics [here](#)), we went a bit deeper with a series of questions asking what characteristics factor the highest in customers' Unix brand vs. brand decisions. We weren't surprised to see that criteria relating to system/solution availability and reliability ranked highest. (You can find those results [here](#).)

We took this a bit farther still by asking the customers how much difference they see between competing vendors on these buying criteria. For example, customers ranked 'Operating System Quality' as their second most important buying decision factor. And it certainly is important.

But... how much difference do they think exists between the major Unix vendors on this score? It's like saying that it's critically important that tires on a new car are absolutely round. That's true. But every car manufacturer is selling cars with excellently rounded tires, so it's not a point of difference between them.

"How much difference is there between the major Unix vendors on the following factors?" (Top 4)



The top points of difference, in customers' minds, are ranked in the chart at left.

In the top spot is system 'Acquisition Price.' More than half believe there's a 'huge' or 'significant' difference in vendor price tags.

What's fascinating is that these same customers rated 'Acquisition Price' as the eighth most important factor in their decision-making process – almost last.

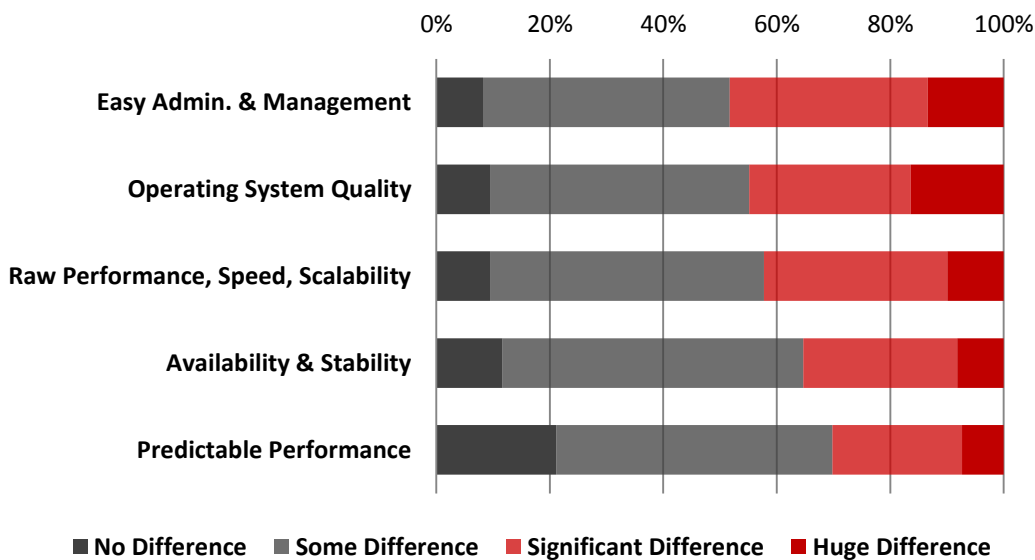
We see the same thing with the second entry, 'We know the systems – no learning curve.' They rated this factor dead last, ninth out of nine, as a decision criterion; but it's in second place in terms of brand differentiation. This

means that while they see significant differences between Unix brands in terms of features/functions and how to use them, they don't see moving from one brand to another as a major hurdle.

'Virtualization Capability and Tools' is also seen as a significant differentiator between brands by more than half of our respondents. All three commercial Unix systems have some level of virtualization, but there's quite a bit of difference in both the breadth and depth of their offerings along these lines – particularly when it comes to virtualization management.

Customers also see quite a bit of difference when it comes to vendor solution support. This factor isn't just vendor-supplied break/fix and professional services; it also extends to patches, updates, and how easy it is to work with the vendor.

"How much difference is there between the major Unix vendors on the following factors?" (5th - 9th place)



'Easy Administration and Management' comes in fifth in terms of differentiation – a bit of a surprise, given how complex IT is these days with greater demands for speed and multiple workloads sharing physical systems.

Vendors have invested heavily in instrumenting their systems and providing management suites to take advantage of it. They did this to address a pain point cited by customers time and time again.

Almost half of our respondents see overall o/s quality as a major source of difference between the brands. Just over 40% say that there's a lot of difference between systems in terms of raw performance and scalability. To us, this seventh-place ranking – coupled with the last-place ranking of 'Predictable Performance' – means that customers are generally satisfied with the performance offered by modern commercial Unix systems.

Customers also see little differentiation between commercial Unix vendors when it comes to system availability and stability characteristics. Only 8% believe there is a 'huge' delta between the major vendors on this factor; an additional 27% say there is a significant difference. Again, we see this as proof that current commercial Unix offerings are pretty solid when it comes to offering customers stable and reliable platforms.

Based on our experience, we believe that there are probably more differences in the above categories than customers might realize. The fact that customers don't realize these differences exist is a hit on vendor marketing prowess more than anything else.

While vendors are great at putting out reams of data sheets and gigabytes of very pretty PowerPoint slides, they typically fall down when it comes to explaining their approach and its advantages in clear terms. They resort to vague generalities or acronym-packed, engineering-authored deep dives, neither of which addresses the basic customer questions: "Why should I care?" and "What will it do for us?"

We're going to continue to track these factors in future surveys and perhaps add a few more selections. It will definitely be interesting to see how (or if) opinion changes over time.

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



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