

2010 Survey: No Clear Winner on x86 System Quality Measures

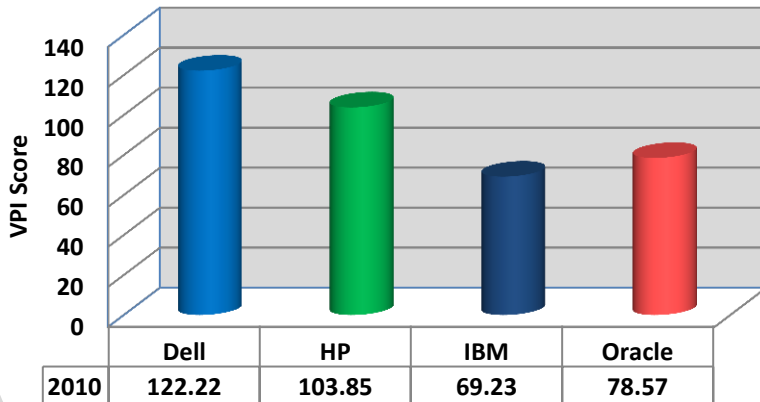
A major part of the **2010 GCG x86 Server Vendor Preference** survey is the Vendor Face-Off section. This is where we ask real-world data center personnel to rate the major x86 server vendors (Dell, HP, IBM, and Oracle) on a wide variety of technical, vendor support, and customer satisfaction criteria.

Vendors are rated in terms of their VPI score – a simple normalization technique we use to ensure that results aren't skewed. (For more details on the survey and methodology, [click here](#).) In simple terms, a VPI score of 100 is 'par'. Scores above 100 are good, and scores less than 100 – well, they're not so good.

It's also important to point out that there isn't an overall 'winner' or 'loser' in these surveys. We ask a lot of questions and cover a wide range of topics, some of which are more important to particular customers than to others. For example, some customers would value manageability more highly than performance, while others want high availability most of all. Are all x86 servers alike on these characteristics? According to the people who purchase, manage, and rely on them day-to-day, the answer is a resounding "No!"

In this installment, we're looking at results on "Fit & Finish." We're not talking about how stylish the systems are, or whether the tail fins are shined up enough. Rather, we're asking how our survey respondents rate the major vendors on delivery quality – ease of setup, hardware consistency, and all-around initial quality. Here are the results....

Easy to Set Up and Use

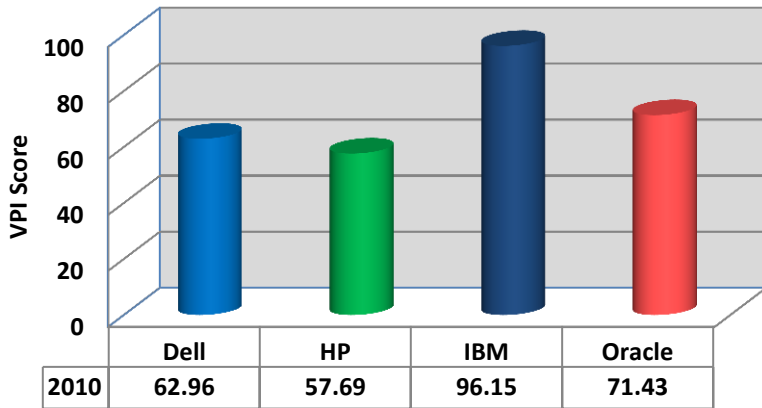


This is Dell's biggest win on this edition of the survey – just like last year. Dell seems to have broken the code on delivering systems that come out of the box almost ready to use. While both IBM and HP improved this year (Oracle stayed about the same), Dell ramped up their score a bit more.

Users report that the major downside with non-Dell vendors is that their servers require considerable updating and patching before they can be used. This is a source of frustration to customers and adds significant time to deployment.

While some might think that x86 servers are paragons of standardization, we found that 60% of our respondent base feels that there are definite differences between the major vendors....

Adherence to Standards



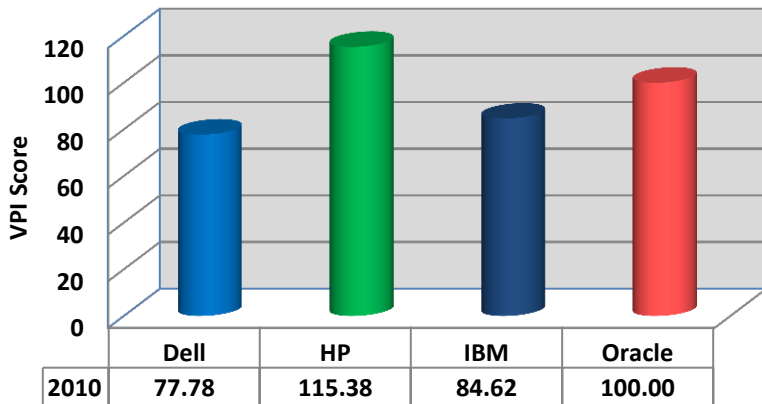
IBM tops the others in how well they observe industry standards in their system builds and how consistently they conform to their own standards. HP won this category last year by a comfortable margin.

What's changed over time on this question is that more customers (40% this year) are saying that there isn't any difference between vendors, or that they don't know the difference. This means that the vendors as a whole are doing a much better job on making sure their systems conform to both their own and industry standards. Good job on their part.

A key, but often overlooked, factor in system quality is how well the vendor maintains the quality of their hardware builds. This doesn't just mean delivering systems that are the same in terms of functionality and configuration – it's more than that. Some vendors have changed subtle, but important, components during the life of a product line.

Real-world example: a vendor updated a NIC on a system, and a customer bought one thinking it was an identical replacement to existing systems. Unfortunately, just this small difference was enough to cause their ERP application to choke in unpredictable ways. It was a very hard problem to troubleshoot and spawned a lot of angst. If the vendor had tested the new system with the solution, or even if they had better documented the change, a lot of pain could have been avoided. That story is why we ask this question in our surveys...

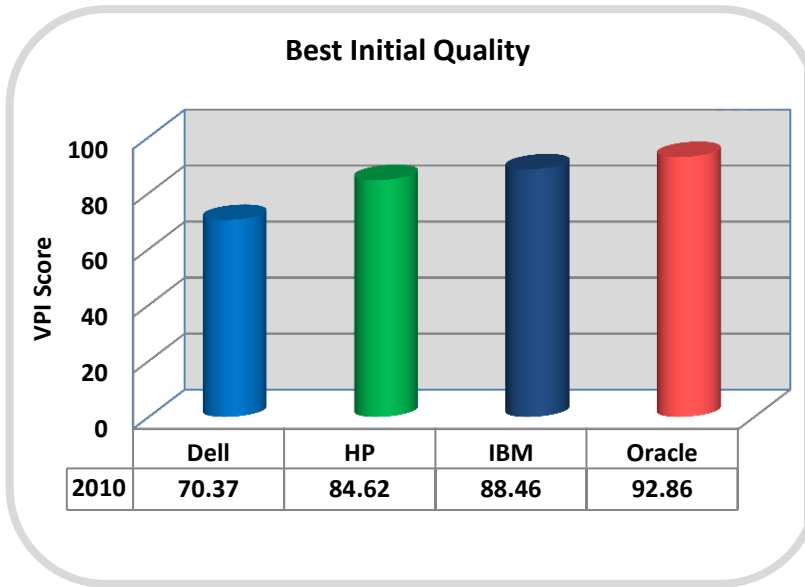
Hardware Build Consistency



According to customers, HP does the best job in delivering hardware that is tested and conforms to the published system configuration. HP has a strong track record on this question – winning it by a wide margin for the past three years.

IBM's score has slipped a bit since 2009, while Dell improved their score considerably. Oracle also turned in a nice score on this category – making it one of their strongest showings in the survey.

This last question asks which of the major x86 system vendors exhibits the out-of-the-box quality...



Oracle notches a win in this category, as they did last year. It's a narrow victory over IBM and HP, but a victory nonetheless. Dell really improved a huge amount in this area vs. 2009.

Fully 30% of our respondents this year said either that there isn't any difference between vendors on this measure, or that they didn't see any difference. That's quite an endorsement; it shows that all of the vendors are doing a good job of delivering functioning and high quality systems.

In general, all of the major vendors are doing a pretty good job on fit, finish, and delivery issues. Dell is a bit noteworthy in this section of the survey. They scored a large victory in the "Easy to Set Up and Use" category and improved their scores over last year's results by a wide margin.

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