

2010 Survey: IBM, HP Tops in x86 Server RAS

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.

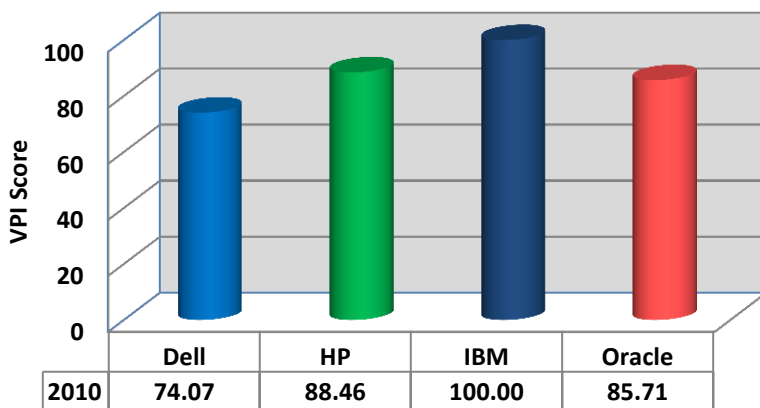
Vendors are rated in terms of their VPI score – a simple normalization technique we use to ensure that results aren't skewed. (For more details on the survey and methodology, [click here](#).) In simple terms, a VPI score of 100 is 'par'. Scores above 100 are good, and scores less than 100 – well, they're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

Today the topic is RAS: Reliability, Availability & Serviceability. This is one of the most critical attributes of any system, and certainly something that every data center manager considers closely when making a server decision. With x86 servers, the system vendors are all working with mostly the same hardware, operating systems, and firmware. However, the way they put these pieces together – and what they wrap around the systems in terms of sophisticated software and advice – can make a big difference in delivered uptime.

In our first RAS question, we asked customers which system brand has the best and widest range of availability and reliability features....

Availability & Reliability Features

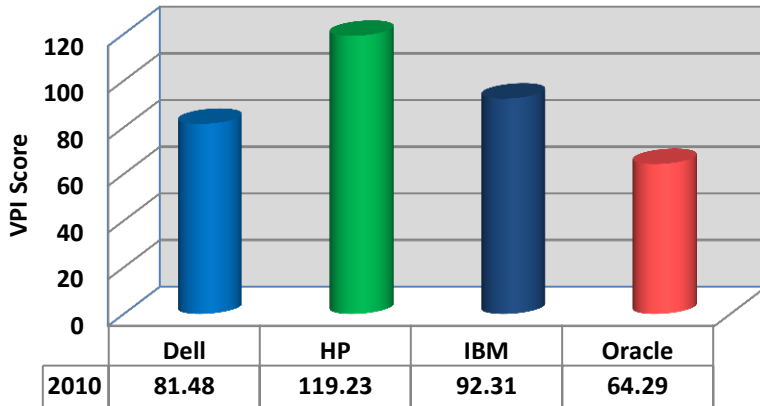


As can be seen from the chart, customers see IBM's System x brand as offering the best availability and reliability feature set. IBM won this category last year as well, but by a lower margin. IBM's use of a custom x86 chipset gives them some advantages that are difficult for competitors to match in this area.

HP fell a bit this year from their 2009 score, and Oracle stayed about even. Dell, however, made a big improvement – moving from a score of 58 to 74. A significant number of customers said that they don't see much difference between the vendors in this area, which is bad news for all of the vendors.

The question below is probably the most telling in this section of the survey. It asks customers to rate the availability and reliability they see from the major brand servers in their own data centers, running their own workloads.

Observed Availability/Reliability

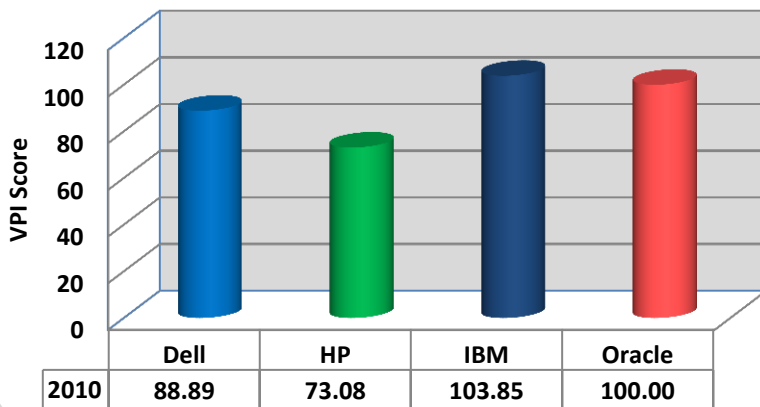


This is a sizeable win for HP in 2010, and a solid follow-up to their win on this question in 2009. The VPI score of more than 100 signifies that a number of customers who have standardized on other brands voted HP as best on this criterion.

IBM comes in second this year, as they did in 2009, but their score has slipped slightly. Oracle ends up in 4th place – considerably behind the others. Even though Dell finished third, their score this year was significantly higher than their 2009 result.

In the serviceability category, we're asking customers which brands have the best design for service purposes. This can include having easy access to hardware, good cable management, logical placement of components, and other factors.

Serviceability Features



IBM posts a narrow win over Oracle in this category, with Dell in third place. IBM frequently markets their system design prowess, and Oracle (formerly Sun) has the benefit of designs from Andy Bechtolsheim.

Dell moved from a distant fourth into third place, as their design changes begin to resonate with customers. It's a bit of a surprise to see HP in fourth place here, given their emphasis on blade servers and the ease of access inherent in that form factor. However, we note that 20% of customers didn't see much difference between vendors on this category.

So: we have a mixed bag in terms of system availability, with HP and IBM both taking wins in these categories. HP's win on 'Observed Availability' is definitely something to write home about, while IBM still takes the 'Availability & Reliability Features' and 'Serviceability' categories. The most improved player in this set of questions is Dell, by a wide margin. They radically improved their showing on every factor. Oracle is in the hunt on every category except the most important one, 'Observed Availability', where they trail badly.

In our next installment, we take a look at how well the vendors put together and deliver the hardware. We also ask how easy it is to set up the systems and get them doing useful work. You can find that report [here](#).

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



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