

Enterprise Networks



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The Value of Technical SMEs

Like many of you, I belong to several LinkedIn professional groups. Recently, there was a lively discussion in one of the groups about subject-matter experts (SMEs) and their value. That thread served as the inspiration for this column.

Let's start with a simple definition of SME from Wikipedia: A subject-matter expert (SME) is a person who is an authority in a particular area or topic. This is a simple enough definition and pretty hard to refute.

In my opinion, the mainframe community doesn't have a current or pending skills shortage. IBM, through its Academic

platform is a developing shortage of SMEs. IBM's latest resource actions have deprived the mainframe community of several top-notch SMEs. There are SMEs who are retiring, and unfortunately, also some who've passed away recently. That two-decade gap in the university curriculum, turning away from the mainframe, and drinking the McNealy-Alsop Kool-Aid is what I believe has led to this.

Who in your company is known as the SME for performance? Storage? Networking? CICS? DB2?


This dearth of SMEs is already visible

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Initiative for System z, has done a great job of tackling that issue head on. Colleges that are part of the program, such as North Carolina A&T, Syracuse University and Marist College, are producing System z skilled graduates who are top-notch people, ready to take the platform into the next 50 years. Hopefully, I will be alive to see the 100th anniversary of the IBM mainframe.

I believe our issue as a community and a

and having an impact. For example, have you recently attended a conference such as SHARE, Guide Share Europe (GSE), Computer Measurement Group (CMG) or an IBM mainframe-themed conference? Have you noticed how attendance isn't what it used to be? Have you noticed how many "big name" speakers (i.e., SMEs) aren't attending or presenting? For example, it used to be that a Pat Artis (Dr. Pat) session



at SHARE, CMG or anywhere was guaranteed to be a valuable learning and inspiring session that a mainframe storage and/or I/O performance professional wouldn't want to miss. The room would be

they lead and they help us learn the most we can about the computing platform we love.

This is what I fear we're about to miss as a community of mainframe professionals as these long-time SMEs leave us for whatever

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packed. You left Dr. Pat's session with a wealth of knowledge that you could take back to work and put into use. Plus, you would hear a funny joke or two. If you were like me, you made an effort to get to know Pat and learn more from him. I was very fortunate in that Pat mentored me and inspired me to complete my Ph.D. I am honored to call him a friend and to have been a student of his. I miss seeing him at conferences and I'm sad that many of our new mainframers won't get to learn from him or his fellow SMEs.

Anybody can give a presentation or write a paper. But these above and beyond items are the kind of things SMEs can do. They inspire,

the reason. They're really what kept the platform going through the dark days when the longevity of the mainframe was in question. Despite the naysayers, they kept the fires going. Now, some of us need to pick up the SME torch and carry it to help get the platform to April 7, 2064. **ETJ**

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