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## IBM Gives i5 the High Five

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IBM has announced the next generation of the system formerly known as the iSeries: now the System i5 line, a system designed for small and mid-sized business (SMB). IBM is positioning the system to help mask IT operation complexity, deliver excellent performance, and offer a large range of applications across four operating systems. The new System i5 line will include the POWER5+ processor, and provides up to a 33% increase in performance over the current POWER5-based iSeries models. In conjunction with the new processors, IBM will have a new version of the integrated operating system, i5/OS V5R4, with enhanced security and disaster recovery features. The System i5 can also run Linux, AIX 5L, and Microsoft Windows applications on the same system.

Highlights of the announcement include:

- ◇ Extended Microsoft Windows Integration. With the System i5, IBM is introducing an industry-standard iSCSI connection. This will make it easier to integrate and manage Intel-based systems from the i5.
- ◇ New auditing and intrusion detection capabilities in i5/OS V5R4 to protect against network attacks such as scanning for open TCP/IP ports.
- ◇ Virtual tape support in i5/OS V5R4, allowing companies to save directly to disk for quicker backup.
- ◇ New database management tools for the integrated DB2 UDB database.
- ◇ New i5/OS boot from SAN capability to start the OS directly from the IBM SAN server.
- ◇ New 32-bit Java Virtual Machine, enabling companies to reduce memory costs when deploying Java applications.
- ◇ Apache Axis APIs integrated into help simplify integration between i5/OS applications and service-oriented architecture (SOA) Web services.
- ◇ New Capacity on Demand capability throughout the family, down to the 520 two-way model.

IBM is positioning this system as an “all-in-one” IT system for small and mid-sized businesses that have fewer IT staff and need prepackaged hardware and software that includes the OS, database, application servers, networking, security, and management tools as well as storage.

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This announcement from IBM is crammed full of information and updates that improve the System i5 on several fronts and require multiple readings to properly get the full impact. On one level, it is typical of an IBM announcement for a major system. On another level, this launch is much more than a new product. It is an occasion for the iSeries/System i5 group publicly to look at where they've been in the last year, and to declare where they intend to go over the next year. Just a bit more than one year ago, Mark Shearer took over the group, when Mike Borman was brought over to run software sales. Borman had only been in the job for a few months and there was some whispering in the community about what IBM was about and what Shearer

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would be like. While the System i5 in all its various incarnations had been esteemed by many senior IBM executives, it hadn't always received the care and feeding it deserved from corporate. As the UNIX and Wintel worlds grew in popularity, the iSeries seemed to be adrift. Customers were happy to continue running their RPG applications on the system, but many new workloads were being deployed on alternate systems, and ISVs found themselves wooed by companies like Microsoft and encouraged to port their applications to other platforms. The truth was that IBM had drifted away from the core iSeries values and had forgotten what had made it such a great system. Fortunately, the user base hadn't forgotten, and many loyal customers remained. Ironically, the values that made the iSeries such a great system for all those years were actually more important in the current IT age of burgeoning complexity, advanced interoperability, and management requirements. When Shearer stepped in, he went out and talked to those customers, heard what they had to say, and gathered corporate resources together to return the iSeries to what it should be and demonstrate that the system was more relevant than ever. Borrowing a page from the Mainframe group, the iSeries team created a Charter for iSeries Innovation. This was a commitment by IBM to iSeries customers that the company would continue to support the platform through innovations, solutions, and partnership with monies for ongoing R&D, increasing the number of applications available, and helping to broaden the available skills base for the iSeries. The results were evident as customers turned to embrace the platform again and IBM had double-digit platform growth through most of the year.

Now a year later, IBM is taking the time to renew that commitment, drawing on the changes started in 2005 and looking ahead to the next set of challenges in 2006. This year the company is committing to promoting solutions innovation, promoting partnership, and simplifying IT. This year it will focus innovation on industry-specific solutions and local markets, grow support for applications and tools, and help to jointly market business solutions based on the System i5. For partnership, it will continue to help grow the skills and expertise needed to build on demand solutions, and help partners team up to provide solutions. Finally IBM is pledging to make System i5 the leader of complete business solutions to simplify IT. This strategic restatement of commitment is underlying the more tactical announcements, and provides much of the flavor for what the System i5 team has in mind, as each part of the announcement fits into one or more of these areas of innovation.

In the last year, IBM has credibly demonstrated to the customer base that it is fully committed to the System i5/iSeries platform and the base has responded. However, we believe there is still a significant part of the base that can upgrade their systems, and we believe this announcement should help convince a few more customers to trade in their oldies but goodies for shiny new systems. In addition, the bigger challenge continues to be the wider IT world that doesn't already have experience with iSeries. IBM is going to have to work significantly harder to tempt them to a new platform. At the same time, existing infrastructure is complex, complicated, and hard to manage. While all vendors are working to solve the same problem set, the System i5 has a head start with its "all-in-one" heritage. The biggest challenge for the i5 has been to get enough mindshare. However, the market is waiting for the new version of Microsoft Windows, Vista, and Linux is still building trust within the IT sphere as an application platform, so customers are already thinking about new solutions and their impact on their existing IT infrastructure. If IBM can get its marketing right, and make good on its goals for vertical solutions with local market partnerships, then it is well positioned to make 2006 the year of the System i5.