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45 years with InterSystems 1978 - 2023

I decided to write this down before time wiped out my memory
It's a very personal story as a partner, as a competitor, as an employee,
as a customer and finally as an external observer of InterSystems.

After superfast graduation from Technical University in Vienna,
some years of development for a virtual machine at SIEMENS,
some hard-core networking experience and core OS development at OLIVETTI
I joined Digital Equipment (DEC) in 1978 as a support and sales engineer of
their brand new DSM-11.

The core of DSM-11 - the Global module - was written by Terry Ragon.
I had the chance to meet him during the kick-off training in Maynard, MA.
InterSystems was rather fresh after its foundation.

It was a challenging time to get in all the (to me) new hardware technology
and all the details of that big cake of operating system, database, and interpreter.
It was fascinating. It was great to see how I could win any benchmark against
traditional relational DBs.

As the provider of the core engine, I saw InterSystems as a Partner

Though based on my background in virtualization. I just couldn't resist
modifying and adjusting drivers and disk modules to transform DSM-11
into a "Layered Product" [an App] running with almost the same
performance on top of RSX-11M.

You might imagine DEC was not so pleased with this experiment.
Especially as short time later, they started the same exercise on VMS.
The result was poor and not attractive to customers at that time.
DEC was just not able to understand what jewel they had in their hands.
Later, under the guidance of InterSystems, this gap was closed.

But one of my customers invited me to write his own "DSM-like" OS
directly on bare-bone VAX without any bit of VMS.

How often did you hear from such an engineering opportunity?

It was one of those

"IMPOSSIBLE - CAN'T BE DONE" triggers that I met during my life.

We were 2 experienced engineers dedicated to the project:
Bought a VAX-750 in 1981, started to read the processor handbook
and after passing page 35 we started typing on the console.

Realistic:

- There was a design beyond the limits of PDP
- There was a stack of new functionalities
- Already supporting diskless machines over Ethernet,
- I created the bootstraps, my own protocol on Ethernet,
my own hardware format on disk, that no one else could read.

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A huge effort. But after 18 months only it was done
and we could run the first installation at a customer.

This was the time when InterSystems became a Competitor.
A very remote one since there was no overlap in the market.
We watched suspiciously each other from a far distance.

It was a commercial success for the company.
For me, it became a lot of routine work with MicroVAX as a main box.
Bug fixing and a fresh release every now and then was no real challenge.

Some years later DEC offered a new "MISSION IMPOSSIBLE" to me and I followed
It was a technology challenge - but far from the old DSM that was gone
out of scope. And it converted into an organizational and management challenge
So I sold my "Engineer Soul" to climb up international management in DEC.
But that made me aware of the "Quality" and "Customer first" mindset.

When Compaq bought DEC, the local management structures were destroyed.
Looking for new opportunities I was contacted by a headhunter.
Big surprise: his customer was InterSystems:

Within a few weeks, I joined as Employee and felt at home immediately.
Now I realized what I had missed for a long time - Creative Working -
and what I had sold just for a few bucks more.

I just joined when objects became invisible in the local partition.
Caché Studio was fresh and new. And 2 decades of development had gone.
But the basic structures were the same that I had built into my own variant.
And of top importance to me "Quality first" + "Customer dedication"

I spent 12 very exciting years at InterSystems seeing a lot of new features
raising and some less attractive ones fading away.
But it was never a routine job. Every day a different challenge to fight.

I'm especially proud that I never lost any benchmark against other DBs:
Topped by winning against Oracle Spatial by a significant factor.

After my retirement 9 years ago I changed into the role of a
Customer of InterSystems. This experience completes the image.
A very personal pleasure to me is this Developer Community that I joined in 2017
Now I see myself in the role of Observer of InterSystems. understand
I proposed it already back in 2005. But it was just too early to be accepted

My dedication to Customers + Quality is unbroken and my message to
my support engineers at DEC is still valid for me:

- the customer is always right - he has the problem
- our products may have a bug - so find it
- the description of our products might be wrong - explain it better
- don't assume the customer has your technical background - explain in detail
- we didn't understand what the bug is - ask twice and try to listen deeper

Those are also the 5 principles I apply when I do my reviews on OEX
and that makes the quality of an OEX package.

Now in 2023 I became a critical Observer and have my surprises,
have some déjà-vue recognizing old ideas fresh dressed. My applause
for news is filtered. Some are great some less convincing.

I always try to pass on my personal experience to those that ask for it.
And sometimes I try to remind contributors, that their articles or packages are a service to the other members and they deserve Quality.

I hope it wasn't boring for you.

[#Other](#)

Source URL: <https://community.intersystems.com/post/45-years-intersystems-1978-2023>