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Tailor-Made Support

Support Portal customizes tools, notifications to suit your needs

March 2010 | by [Jaqui Lynch](#)

In the past few years, IBM has put a strong focus on improving support on all of their products. In particular, a great number of support options have been added to the line of POWER processor-based products. These include the introduction of Fix Level Recommendation Tool (FLRT), the ability to open service requests through the Web and the introduction of forums and communities online. The latest innovation currently on trial is the new [IBM support portal](#).

The new portal allows you to personalize your experiences and provides a centralized link to many tools, as well as videos and tutorials. After going to the link above, click on the "Try the new site," and it takes you into the portal to the Support and Downloads Quick Start page. From here you can perform a number of tasks.

Product Support

The first option is to select the servers you're looking for. You can choose from Power Systems and System p, but there are options for other servers as well. You then select the OS (AIX, IBM i or Linux) and then choose from a number of options including overview, downloads, troubleshooting, documentation, forums and communities, planning, installation, and usage. Finally, you click on "View Your Page" to see the results. Additional links allow you to search all of the support and downloads, view education or open a service request.

Featured Links and Notifications

Now you're in the customized support page, which provides a set of featured links including direct links to AIX updates, best practices, firmware and Hardware Management Console (HMC) updates, and FLRT access. There's also a link to Fix Central for AIX and IBM i. Another section consolidates notifications for the products you're specifically interested in. In my case, I put all of the Power Systems servers and AIX; from there I was able to click on AIX and modify my subscriptions so notifications are automatically sent to my e-mail. You can receive daily or weekly e-mails, as well as the option to get the e-mail in plain text (important for blackberry readability) rather than html format. Notifications include not just problem notifications, but also notification when drivers and other OS components are updated, forum updates, news and Webcasts and more. Being able to tailor the notifications makes this far more valuable.

Flashes, Alerts and Product News

The flashes and alerts section allows you to add the latest alerts to the page so whenever you login you will see those alerts. Additionally, product news provides the latest news about the products you may be interested in. On my page it shows news for software available on Power Systems and System p servers. This included announcements about the new version of FLRT and the latest AIX v6.1 installation tips.

Support Services

Here, you can access information about electronic services and electronic service agent (ESA), and link to the new IBM Support Assistant, which provides tools to assist you with problem determination. There's also a new section for software support that allows you better access to support on middleware products. This includes a support portal.

Support Resources

This section includes links related to support subscriptions, RSS feeds, software electronic support, passport advantage and education assistant. It includes phone numbers for contacting IBM for support issues. The product-related links are customized based on the products you selected. Mine had links regarding warranties and licenses, alphaWorks and developerWorks. Directly below these is an overview section that has links to a number of other support-related entities.

Other features

At the very bottom right of the support page, there's a support-feedback section, where you can help improve your support experience. You can also choose to participate in a couple of online surveys. Directly below that is the translation section, where you can have translate the pages into various languages including Spanish, Korean, Chinese, French and German, just to name a few. I tried Spanish and it seemed to do a nice job. You also have the ability to add modules to your page if you need additional links.

Fix Recommendation Tools

One of the links that I followed took me to the page that has all of the [fix recommendation tools](#). On this page, you can access the tools for AIX and IBM i, and links are provided to external sites for both RedHat and Novell's SUSE Linux. For AIX two links were provided: FLRT and the prerequisite tool. The prerequisite tool allows you to put in the system model and type and a feature code (i.e. 9117-MMA and 5759). It then tells you this is a 4 GB dual-port Fibre adapter. If you click on the feature code on the left, it takes you to the prerequisite page for that feature code—which provides you with a list of minimum levels of AIX, Linux and firmware in order to support the feature you're planning to add. This is invaluable as a research tool when performing upgrades to hardware.

FLRT provides guidance with respect to software maintenance. It's now been enhanced to support Linux as well as IBM i and AIX. You can get to FLRT via the support portal or [directly](#). FLRT provides upgrade recommendations for software and firmware, providing custom reports for each system. Support is built-in, not just for the OSs mentioned, but also for the HMC virtual I/O server (VIOS), high-availability cluster multiprocessing (HACMP) and general parallel file system (GPFS). FLRT is a great way to check if products are at the recommended levels and any interdependencies are being met. The combination of FLRT and the prerequisite tool is a very powerful way to avoid potential problems when considering upgrades or planning for updates.

Support Through Change

Clearly there are some significant changes being made to the support environment for Power Systems solutions. I highly recommend you spend some time in the new portal, where you can customize the environment to meet your needs. IBM is also looking for feedback on the portal, so it can be improved before going into full production. I did find a couple of things that took some getting used to, but overall I think the new portal is a great improvement on the old support pages.

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