

NASA shuts down its last mainframe computer

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Sittra Battle of the Marshall Space Flight Center shuts down NASA's last mainframe computer. Credit: NASA

NASA has just powered down its last mainframe computer. Umm, everyone remembers what a mainframe computer is, right? Well, you certainly must recall working with punched cards, paper tape, and/or magnetic tape, correct? That does sound a little archaic. “But all things must change,” wrote Linda Cureton on the [NASA CIO blog](#). “Today, they are the size of a refrigerator but in the old days, they were the size of Cape Cod.”

The last mainframe being used by [NASA](#), the IBM Z9 Mainframe, was being used at the Marshall Space Flight Center. Cureton described the mainframe as a “big computer that is known for being reliable, highly

available, secure, and powerful. They are best suited for applications that are more transaction oriented and require a lot of input/output – that is, writing or reading from data storage devices.”

In the 1960’s users gained access to the huge mainframe computer through specialized terminals using the punched cards. By the 1980s, many mainframes supported graphical terminals where people could work, but not graphical user interfaces. This format of end-user computing became obsolete in the 1990s when personal computers came to the forefront of computing.

Most modern mainframes are not quite so huge, and excel at redundancy and reliability. These machines can run for long periods of time without interruption. Cureton says that even though NASA has shut down its last one, there is still a requirement for mainframe capability in many other organizations. “The end-user interfaces are clunky and somewhat inflexible, but the need remains for extremely reliable, secure transaction oriented business applications,” she said.

But today, all you need to say is, “there’s an app for it!” Cureton said.

Source: [Universe Today](#)

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