

Newsdesk

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- HP Linux groupworking PCs ● Lindows launches Linspire ● Linux PDA ● Linux in Hollywood

THE US\$2 BILLION APOLOGY

Sun and Microsoft – an unholy alliance?

Sun and Microsoft, bitter industry combatants for over 20 years, have decided to bury the hatchet; and speculation is mounting that this unholy alliance may be intending to turn its fire on Linux. The two companies have shelved all ongoing litigation, and in return Microsoft has offered Sun a US\$2 billion apology. However, it is thought the deal and its provision for closer co-operation on patent issues will be a forerunner to a new legal offensive by Microsoft to stall adoption of Linux in the lucrative OS market.

On the other hand, some have suggested it may presage a new understanding of the reality of a market in which proprietary software must 'play nice' with Linux on the server and, increasingly, the desktop.

Announcing the deal, Sun Chairman Scott McNealy said this was the beginning of a new era of co-operation between the two companies, one that would preserve rather than restrict customer choice.

"This agreement will be of significant benefit to both Sun and Microsoft customers. It will stimulate new products, delivering great new choices for customers who want to combine server products from multiple vendors and achieve seamless computing in a heterogeneous computing environment. We look forward to this opportunity – it provides a framework



Bitter enemies put aside their differences in the name of commerce. But how long will the smiles last?

for cooperation between Sun and Microsoft going forward."

Microsoft's Steve Ballmer said it was not the end of competition, but that there was a recognition that *"cutting-edge R&D and intellectual property protection are the foundation for the growth and success of our industry."*

"This is a positive step forward for both Sun and Microsoft, but the real winners are the customers and developers who rely on our products and innovations," he said.

Pundits have suggested that Microsoft's reason for dealing was the recent legal difficulties with the

European Union, while Sun's was a little more prosaic: money, and lots of it. Both, in the words of eWeek's Stephen Vaughan-Nichols can envision Linux and Open Source *"eating their lunch."*

In the past, large-scale IT players such as IBM, HP, Sun and Microsoft have accrued vast patent 'armouries' with the result that – akin to the nuclear arms race during the Cold War – the industry remained at stalemate. Microsoft is rumoured to hold a number of patents which relate directly to the Linux kernel, but the possibility of reciprocal action by the likes of Sun and IBM on patents they hold has

prevented the Redmond giant using those particular weapons in the fight against competitors. But with all else failing, and the SCO case not denting the growing popularity of Linux, Microsoft and Sun may feel the time has come to bring out the big guns.

In tandem with this Microsoft news, Sun also confirmed the ascendancy of Jonathan Schwartz to the role of company President. Schwartz, seen as a supporter of Linux within the company, stressed Sun's continued support of the OS and announced an agreement that will see Sun Java Desktop-based PCs on sale in Wal-Mart stores in the US.



Chris Stone, Linus Torvalds and Jack Messman take questions from the floor at Brainshare 2004.

INCREASED LINUX ADOPTION

Novell Brainshare one year on...

Novell's 2004 Developer Conference

marks the first anniversary of the company's big push into the Linux sector. In that time, it has purchased two of the most high-profile Linux 'brands', become enmeshed in the SCO/IBM tussle and signalled its intention to build its future on Open Source software.

As expected, there were a number of developments in the camp as this year's Brainshare event got underway.

Despite its ownership of GNOME developer Ximian, Novell Chairman Jack Messman affirmed that SUSE would continue to be a KDE focussed distribution into the near future. The ultimate goal, though, is to migrate Linux to a single desktop, something Messman says the combined 'development muscle' of SUSE and Ximian are more than capable of. Chris Schlager, VP of R&D at SUSE, says it's not a case of merging the two DEs, but taking the best of both worlds to make a unified desktop. The process has already started, he says, with the Ximian Desktop 2 for SUSE project "but you'll see the first major results of this effort in the next versions of SUSE Linux, which will be released toward the end of the year."

Linus Torvalds, the godfather of Linux, turned up at the opening of the Brainshare conference to bestow his

blessing on the Novell move into FOSS. During a Question and Answer session, Torvalds was asked what the next big thing in Linux would be. Gesturing toward Messman and his depute Chris Stone, he said: "I only work with the kernel itself. You guys can maybe be the next big thing in Linux on a different scale." Torvalds also highlighted the dangers that patents pose to the entire industry.

"Software patents, where non-technical issues can be used to stop development, stop people from doing what they want to do and can do – that, to me, is the biggest threat," he said.

In addition to finalising the US\$50 million investment by IBM, Novell also unveiled a new partnership with Hewlett Packard to support SUSE Linux right across the enterprise. Martin Fink, HP's Vice President of Linux, said they were the first major technology vendor to offer enterprise customers a single, proven Linux solution from desktop to data centre. "Our relationship with Novell is based on a joint commitment to innovation, low-cost platforms, and total customer experience," he said.

Finally, Chris Stone revealed that Novell has begun the process of migrating all its desktop systems to *OpenOffice.org*, with a full move to Linux pencilled in for 2005.

NEWSBYTES

■ **MandrakeSoft** has begun to offer the Official release of Mandrake 10.0 to Club members. By the time you read this, both boxed products and the download edition should be available. The Community Edition, featured on last month's LXF cover discs, has been updated with slightly newer kernel and, insiders say, a lot of bug fixes. In all, MandrakeSoft suggests that the new development regime – which essentially turns Mandrake's early adopters into beta testers – has been a success, addressing some of the quality assurance issues of the past.



■ **Cooperative Linux** is a new project aimed at making OS choice less problematic. The system, nicknamed CoLinux, allows a full implementation of Linux to run within a Windows NT-based session. Developers say the Open Source application offers some serious advantages over traditional virtualisation software such as *VMware*. It should work (with some small modifications) with any Linux distribution, and the team have had considerable success running Knoppix on the system. <http://www.colinux.org/>

■ **The Mozilla Organisation** has begun the beta testing process for the next major release, 1.7, which will become the next 'stable' branch of the suite. Changes in this release include facilities to prevent sites blocking the context menu, better theme support for *GTK+* themes, and support for MSN Authentication in the mail client. Performance is said to have improved substantially; start up times are speeded up by eight per cent, and a similar increase in page rendering speed, with a reduction in binary size of five per cent. www.mozilla.org/

■ **Wyse Technology** is adding support for Linux-based appliances from Neoware Systems to its Rapport management software. In addition to Neoware and its own systems, Rapport supports thin client hardware from HP and a wide range of PDAs, scanners and other handheld devices.

■ **Pixar**, the company behind *Toy Story* and *Finding Nemo*, has released an update to its industry standard *Renderman Pro Server*. The upgrade includes support for both Mac OS X and 64-bit Linux for the first time, as well as versions for IRIX, 32-bit Linux and Windows NT.

Jono Bacon

The founder of UK Linux, KDE developer and all-round nice guy, Jono is also a musician who's tunes have been featured on Slashdot.



COMMENT

'Parasite' vs gift culture

“ At a recent computing trade show, I took part in a special Linux debate with a panel of notable figures from Linux-related businesses (Sun, IBM, HP, Red Hat, Novell etc) and Brad Tipp from Microsoft. I had seen Brad at a previous show and was intrigued to see him again at this debate.

In one part of the proceedings, Brad Tipp referred to the R&D culture in Linux as being "parasitic". This definition referenced the way that one company may develop a new product or technology and license it under the GPL, but then competitors can adopt it if useful. He made the point that some companies may *never* contribute back R&D, and hence be parasitic in their culmination of their technology. I can imagine that Open concepts are difficult to fully understand and reason from a typically proprietary background; justification of R&D is difficult to define when the result can be utilised instantly by competitors.

Where I think the point is missed is that Open Source is essentially a gift culture. Red Hat has value in the way that it puts its technology together and supports it; this is the definition of a distributor. What is important for all distributors is that the technology as a whole needs to be constantly improved and expanded. This pushes Linux on as a technology platform in which collaboration improves the industry as a whole.

Linux as a business culture is an interesting combination of sharing, peer review, improvement, gritted teeth marketing and brand value. I hardly think this process is in any way parasitic; I would better describe it as 'symbiotic competition.' ”

LINUX AND CHARITIES

Saving the planet with a SAN

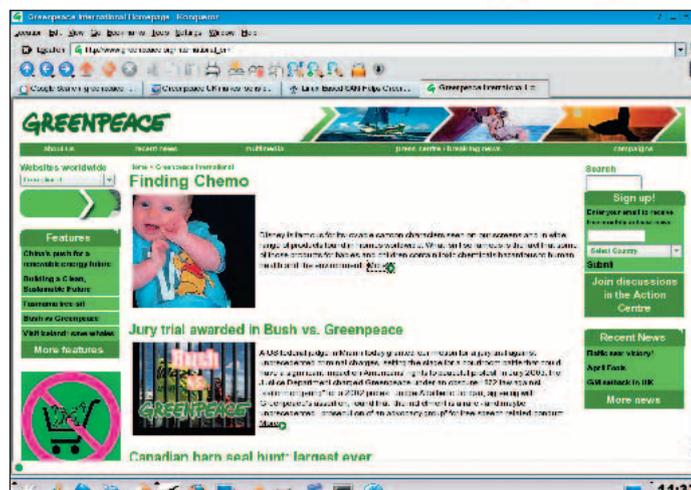
Greenpeace, the charitably funded environmental action group, recently completely an IT upgrade, opting for Linux in three out of four of its critical systems. IT director Steve Thomson said after a process of evaluation the organisation chose Linux for web, application and general office server, but stayed with Windows for the mail server. "We looked at the two and Linux just seemed more flexible, probably cheaper and probably more sensible for these particular bits," he said.

The idea, he said, was to simplify operations which, in the past, had relied on a combination of UNIX, Windows and Novell systems. The core of the system will be a newly acquired

storage area network (SAN) based on IBM's FASi600 storage array used for archiving, running a DB2 database, office applications and storing MS Exchange Server data.

UK retail giant John Lewis has also signalled a change in IT policy by migrating its core business applications to Linux. The company said the planned migration of the formerly Windows-based application, which took place over the Easter bank holiday, went smoothly and would enable the company to cope with the growing number of transactions. Like Greenpeace, the John Lewis partnership opted for IBM hardware for the system, in this case a new eSeries mainframe.

IBM has provided SAN facilities for Greenpeace.



Three out of four isn't bad. Greenpeace will be running web, application and storage on Linux.

Linux Web Watch/

Linux Personal Video

With the BBC under threat of commercialisation, isn't it time you let some Linux apps help your properly organise your personal television viewing?

Deciding that the aging LXF bedroom PC should do more, this month we have been investigating tools for turning it into a humble telly. Well, humble is not really appropriate, because with something like DVR

(<http://dvr.sourceforge.net/>) it should be possible to turn a suitably equipped Linux PC into a sophisticated recording and playback device. But first we need a TV card that works. One of the best sites for information BEFORE you hit the stores is the *Video4Linux* project (<http://www.exploits.org/v4l/>). Here you'll find a rundown of everything needed to watch and record TV and will turn even the newest new user into a savvy buyer.

There are a lot of nascent PVR (personal video recorders) for Linux, but one of the more elegant – on first viewings at least – is *Freevo* (<http://freevo.sourceforge.net/>). *Freevo* promises to turn our PC into a real mediacentre-style workhorse

« <http://dvr.sourceforge.net/>
Dispose of your VCR responsibly!

complete with proper EPG (Electronic Program Guide). Video facilities in this project are provided by *MPlayer* (www.mplayerhq.hu) and *Xine* (<http://xinehq.de>), so it would be useful to have these downloaded and installed, or get them off LXF52's coverdiscs. Finally, having hours of telly programmes recorded to the hard disk is fine for local viewing, but what happens when we want to watch on the big TV in the lounge? Well, getting video onto disk is not the easiest process, but the effort should begin at the home of the *dvrtools* application (www.nongnu.org/dvrtools/), a fork of the more common *cdtools*. But, you've guessed it, *dvrtools* has been tailored towards DVD burning.

» <http://freevo.sourceforge.net>
MPlayer + Xine = Linux PVR!



» www.exploits.org/v4l/
Knowledge is power!



NEWSBYTES

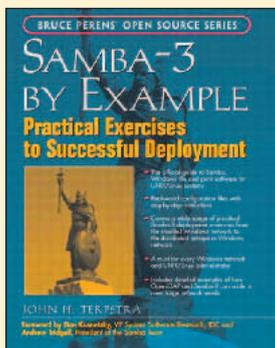
■ The release of **GNOME 2.6** was delayed briefly after an intruder managed to infiltrate the project's main server, which houses the www.gnome.org site. Owen Taylor said that beyond the intrusion "No additional damage has been discovered; at the current time we are cautiously hopeful that the compromise was limited in scope."

■ **Hewlett Packard** has launched a new multi-user Mandrake-based PC that offers facilities for four people to work simultaneously on the same machine. The HP441 system is built around a 1.8Ghz Celeron and 256MB RAM, but includes four graphics cards and inputs for a quartet of keyboards and mice. In addition to the core Mandrake system, each user will also have access to KDE, Mozilla, Evolution and OpenOffice.org, as well as a range of education software.

■ **IndeView** is a new presentation system that can take KPresenter or OpenOffice.org Impress presentations and make them viewable on PCs where native software is not present. The developers say the GPL is the perfect tool for ensuring presentations are pixel perfect regardless of the host system.

■ **MyHosting.com** is offering a **free Linux hosting plan** to its Windows customers in response to customer demand. "We still stand behind and support the Windows platform but we must listen to our customers. And they tell us that applications drive their choice of hosting provider, not the Operating System," said CEO Tony Yustein.

■ **Prentice Hall** has published a new book covering Samba network administration. *Samba 3 - By Example* (ISBN 0-131-47221-6) is part of the *Bruce Perens Open Source* range, and was written by long-time Samba developer John Terpstra. The book is accompanied by a CD-ROM containing samples, scripts and all the tools mentioned in the text. Prentice Hall will also make the 'source code' of the text available as part of the project's official documentation. It should be available on the official Samba site by the time you read this.



NETWORK FILESYSTEM

The end of installation woes?

Zero Install, an offshoot from the ROX project, is attempting to address the common perception that Linux software is difficult to install. In fact, the project takes the process to the extreme, making software installation not just easy, but unnecessary.

The project is built around a network filesystem from which you run applications, and once an application is 'installed', subsequent launches make use of a cache, ensuring that the application runs as smoothly as if it was installed locally. Moreover, the project leaders suggest users will never suffer a dependency error as

software and libraries are fetched dynamically when needed.

The website of this project is at <http://rox.sourceforge.net/phpwiki/index.php/ZeroInstall>, though ironically, installation of the application wrapper itself is not a simple operation!



Installing applications is as simple as double-clicking an icon.

WINDOWS AND LINUX VULNERABILITIES

Distro vendors address the security issue

Distribution vendors Mandrake, Debian, Red Hat and Novell/SUSE have joined forces to rebut the conclusions of a recent survey which found Linux to be less secure than Windows. The report, the vendors suggest, seriously skewed results by not taking into account the seriousness of a threat involved in a reported vulnerability. The four Linux vendors were all involved in the initial research after an approach from analyst group Forrester.

The study would collect data about vulnerabilities and the speed at which they were tackled over a one year period. In their collective statement, the vendors said that problems are assessed according to severity. Windows flaws were regarded as more serious, while Linux vulnerabilities took longer to patch.

"This severity is used to determine the priority at which a fix for a vulnerability is being worked on weighed against other vulnerabilities in our current queue. Our users will know that for critical flaws we can respond within hours. This prioritisation means that lower severity issues will often be delayed to let the more important issues get resolved first."

"Even though the Forrester report claims so, it does not make that distinction when it measures the time elapsed between the public knowledge of a security flaw and the availability of a vendor's fix. For each vendor the report gives just a simple average, the 'All/Distribution days of risk', which gives an inconclusive picture of the reality that users experience. The average erroneously treats all vulnerabilities as equal, regardless of the risk. Not all vulnerabilities have an equal impact on all users."

The full statement is available at <http://lxxer.com/module/newswire/view/9986/index.html>



Linux flaws take longer to fix...

Hoyt Duff

One of 800 Hoyts living in the USA, he runs a fishing pier when not shouting affectionately at his many computers.



COMMENT

A Great Thing

“As I co-author the current *Fedora Core Unleashed* book, people make some interesting assumptions about me.

I just met a chap in a computer store sporting a Tux lapel pin and fretting over a purchase. I offered help, and the discussion wandered. He effervesced with his admiration of Linux and had chosen Fedora Core as his distro, and was elated he had an 'expert' at hand to answer a few questions. But he had questions about GNOME, Nautilus, and Evolution – apps I don't routinely use, as I am simply used to other alternatives. He was aghast that I would use Fedora Core and *not* use the default apps: if RH is a recognised brand and industry leader, wouldn't it choose – and offer – the best?

I explained that Linux *in toto* offers you the flexibility to choose yourself, and many different reasons to choose. I gravitate to a choice based on selecting the best tool for the job – but not always: I'm also resistant to change and frequently make the task fit the tool rather than the 'proper' way. Often, the choices are so similar that it's foolish to invest energy in remaking them.

While Red Hat, Fedora Core and Debian are GNOME-centric; SUSE, Mandrake and Knoppix favour KDE, other WMs and other apps work just as well on those flavours. Why? It's all Linux, no matter which cute mascot is on the desktop.

For me, part of the thrill of learning is exploration, but not everyone wants this. The choice of defaults by vendors insures that, when focused solely on the task, the tools will be up to the job. Distro defaults should be considered merely a convenience. A default usable desktop AND the choice to change it – that's a great thing about Linux. ”

FIGHTING MICROSOFT'S FUD

Lindows battles with MS are Linspirational

After a long-running fight with Microsoft over the generic-ness of the word 'Windows,' Lindows boss Michael Robertson has relented and re-branded his company's OS product as Linspire. Robertson said that, while the legal battle would continue in the USA, it wouldn't be fair – in the light of Microsoft's European legal wins – to restrict the ability of resellers across the world to trade freely.

"First, Microsoft is asking courts to levy massive fines just because users in certain foreign countries can access our website. We can't afford to lose a battle on this topic. Second, we have partnerships with hard disk, motherboard, laptop and desktop companies that want to ship our products to their worldwide market. If they are restricted to certain countries, then it impedes their business and therefore ours."

After failing to secure a legal victory in America, Microsoft went to courts in Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark, to press its trademark case against Lindows with opposite results. Microsoft asked judges to impose a fine of 100,000 Euros for every day the Lindows website was available to users in the affected countries. At the time, Robertson said the process set a very bad precedent for any enterprise.

"We may be headed toward a world in which rich companies can shop



Michael Robertson says the techniques used by Microsoft are a threat to free competition.

around, repeatedly searching for a friendly court that is willing to ban content, ideas, products and choices with which they may disagree," he said. He said changing now, when

Linux was growing and most users had yet to encounter Lindows, would be easier than if the name had become more well-known.

In honour of the name change,

Lindows will be offering free downloads of the newly updated OS using BitTorrent at the company's newly named website, which is now www.linspire.com.

Embedded Linux News

- **Intervideo**, which recently launched its Linux-based InstantOn technology for PCs, has expanded the product to include both PVR and DVD Burning facilities. InstantOn is designed to offer a dual-boot option on media-centric computers and, the company claims, can start up in less than 10 seconds, making it suitable for purposes where a full blown PC is not needed. The PVR tools include time-shifting, pausing live TV and recording programmes for later viewing.

- After a very long wait, **Royal** has announced availability of its Linux-based PDA. The \$399 device is based on Motorola's 200MHz DragonBall processor equipped with 64MB SDRAM, 32MB Flash memory and Trolltech's Qtopia DE and personal information manager suite. The Linea LX is able to work in landscape or portrait mode and has a quite snazzy snap-on keyboard. www.royal.com/



Royal Linea LX: snap-on keyboard not shown.

- The **Simputer** project, which proposed a Linux-based device to bring the communications revolution to India's masses, has launched its first piece of hardware. The collaborative project's first piece of kit combines the features of a music player and organiser, while featuring sophisticated handwriting recognition software. The device also has an on-screen keyboard capable of working in both Hindi and Kannada. For more information, see www.simputer.org/

By Pamela Jones, www.groklaw.net

SCO NEWS

Baystar, which invested US\$20 million in SCO, has asked for its money back, citing breach of the original agreement. Dion Cornett, an analyst for Decatur Jones Equity Partners-Soleil said: "I don't think BayStar is going to be very successful in getting their money back. It's very difficult for a private equity investor to force a redemption on a company that doesn't want to redeem. But it makes it very difficult for SCO to raise future financing."

■ We heard from the overworked judge in the Red Hat case – SCO got trounced. This is the second against SCO in court: the judge refused SCO's request to dismiss Red Hat's case.

■ The judge, while ruling against SCO on its dismissal request, decided to put the case on temporary hold, asking both sides to keep her posted on the progress of the IBM case. She would like the issue of whether IBM "stole" code to be decided before she wades into the arguments Red Hat raises. The day before Judge Robinson's order, SCO asked for another five-month delay in the IBM case for discovery.

■ SCO also asked that IBM's counter-claims be tried in a separate trial, and IBM responded with the suggestion that they will be asking for summary judgement when the discovery process is finished. They expect most, if not all, the issues in the case will be quickly resolved without trial.

■ The next big decision looms in the Novell matter. A hearing is scheduled for May 11 on SCO's Motion to Remand (asking the judge to send the case back to local Utah courts) and on Novell's Motion to Dismiss SCO's complaint in the 'slander of title' dispute. To be found guilty of slander of title requires proving that you knew that your claim was false. It is obvious from Novell's documents that it has a position it believes to be true.

■ The Novell case, in my opinion, is the true heart of everything involving copyrights. If SCO loses here, it's unlikely they will be able to sue end-users for copyright infringement.

■ SCO has been unusually quiet this month, indicating that the judge has asked parties not to try their case in public; except in Germany, where VP Gregory Blepp declared that he had proof of copyright infringement; but all he had was the same discredited materials SCO showed at SCOForum. <http://www.groklaw.net/article.php?story=20040416151214305#c118401>



Linux is making inroads into the mid-range broadcast market.

LINUX AT THE MOVIES

Discreet brings Smoke to Linux

Discreet software is attempting to consolidate its position in the film and effects industry with the release of the *Smoke6* editing and finishing system on Intel-based IBM/Linux workstations. Strong demand from the mid-range broadcast market is said to be behind the release. The software was previously available on Silicon Graphics Octane and Tezro hardware. Porting *Smoke6* to Linux was eased by a collaboration with Nvidia on drivers for the Quadro FX 3000G high-end graphics card. Jeff Brown, general manager of workstation product management at Nvidia, said the partnership had brought about a huge leap in professional visual computing.

"We're resetting industry expectations because it proves that a rock-solid, turnkey editing and finishing system can run on a Linux-based workstation," he said.

IBM's Bob Lenard said that the product could not have come at a better time. "We're seeing post-production and broadcast companies strongly embrace Linux migration because of its speed, networkability and cost-effectiveness," he said. Turnkey systems start at US\$68,000.

Meanwhile, using the same Sony-Panavision 24p high-definition digital cameras used by George Lucas on his *Star Wars* prequels, *Starship Troopers: Hero of the Federation* will become the first feature film to utilise the Rave/HD capture and editing system for a complete production. Based on an Open Source embedded hardware/software combination, RaveHD is geared toward the high-end film and graphics industries and uses standard protocols to ensure it can easily drop into any studio's workflow.



Embedded Linux brings aliens to life for *Starship Troopers 2*.

David Cartwright

David Cartwright is an IT consultant who specialises in providing Linux systems and solutions.



COMMENT

Free trade-offs

“It happened to me again this week. Usually it's: "Oh, you don't want to use Windows, you want to use Linux." This week it was: "Oh, you don't want to use Linux, you want to use OpenBSD.”

On my planet, you implement computer systems in such a way as to give the most appropriate trade-off between solving the business problem and spending resources (people, time and money). So you identify the task that needs to be done, you identify the applications that will allow you to do it, you put each application in the context of (a) the technology you have; (b) the funds available; and (c) the training and capital equipment requirement, and you make a decision. Sometimes the decision will lean toward the platforms that you already have, in order to keep the training and equipment costs down; other times, you'll find an application that's so much better than the competition that you don't mind implementing a completely new platform and training/employing people to support it, because the business benefit of the app is so significant.

What you don't do is say: "XYZ is my pet platform, so we need an application that runs on XYZ”.

Standardisation of protocols, the ubiquity of IP networks, and integration technologies like LDAP mean that intercommunication of different platforms is generally not an issue. As app vendors write more Linux versions, that's a bonus for people like me who make money out of implementing (among other things) Linux systems for business. But let's turn 2004 into *International Stop Arbitrarily Telling Me What Operating System To Use Year*.