



OPERATING SYSTEMS

Linux moving centre stage

Linux is gaining credibility in the datacenter and moving in from the edge according to its major proponents and 2005 will see it start to take over from UNIX as the preferred operating system for business critical applications.

Novell and Redhat see Linux attacking the UNIX base during 2005 rather than the Microsoft base. Freddie Kavanagh, CTO for EMEA at Novell explains the reasoning, "The release of the 2.6 kernel, with features such as hyper threading, makes Linux much more scalable and a real competitor to proprietary UNIX implementations. We are now starting to see companies seriously deploying Linux in the datacenter in mission critical applications that were the reserve of UNIX till now."

Paul Salazar, EMEA Director of Marketing at Red Hat concurs, "The 2.4 kernel had the raw technology ready for the datacenter, but 2.6 has triggered major adoption. At first Linux was very much at the edge, running applications such as web servers, however since the launch of 2.6 we have seen major ISVs like Oracle and SAP supporting the Linux platform."

It appears to be this more business approach that is winning over any doubters according to Freddie Kavanagh, "There is a lot less risk now with these major ISVs supporting Linux. Also there are a lot more techies around now than when we first launched. This has reduced the costs of day to day management and encouraged more organisations to pilot projects for mission critical applications."

Security seems to be another key reason for adoption with this issue high on all enterprise IT managers priorities. Freddie Kavanagh explains, "Security is woven in as standard

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in Linux and though it is still not quite as secure as some implementations of UNIX it still is way out ahead of Windows."

There are other dynamics in the market which are driving the adoption of Linux.

Paul Salazar explains, "The move to virtualised architectures is driving the take up of Linux. There is a huge move to x86 server farms and blade servers working as one virtual server environment delivering more scalability and performance. Also delivering the nirvana of 'more for less'. This environment is ideal for Linux and that is where we are seeing a major uptake."

Freddie Kavanagh also sees the availability of third party tools as helping drive adoption, "Cross platform management products like ZENworks, which provides support for Windows, Linux and NetWare environments and gives companies control over all the operating systems in their environment, are helping the adoption of Linux. With tools such as ZENworks it simplifies the management of diverse server operating system environments and encourages the adoption of Linux."

It is not just the Linux vendors who are talking up Linux, there is not a week that goes by without a new report showing an increase in adoption. However, though many have touted Linux as a real competitor for Windows on the desktop this is one area where Linux does seem to struggle.

The opportunity for the channel has gone from good to great

Microsoft

saves the channel thousands

One Microsoft initiative of real help to its channel partners is about removing some of the up front investment costs associated with purchasing in-house and developer software.

With the Microsoft Action Pack and Empower schemes, Registered members of the Microsoft Partner Programme can access discounted software for their own internal use and for developer purposes.

"At Microsoft, our partners are the key to our success", said Natalie Johnston, Group Manager: Partner Development & Marketing. "That's why we're investing in them, via our Microsoft Partner Programme. Delivering valuable business resources, whilst lowering their costs, by saving them thousands of pounds in up front software costs."

Microsoft Action Pack

The Action Pack is aimed at organisations who provide solutions based on Microsoft products or technologies to third-party customers. For just £199 + VAT, the company will receive one year's access to over £16,000 worth of internal-use software such as Windows XP Professional, Small Business Server 2003 and Internet Security and Acceleration Server 2004.

Empower

Empower is designed for Independent Software Vendors, and provides all the tools they may require to develop software applications for the Microsoft platform this includes Software Developers Kit and access to beta releases. For an annual membership fee of £260 + VAT they will also receive software for internal use.

Microsoft Partner Programme

These initiatives are available to Registered Members of the Microsoft Partner

Programme. The Registered level of the Microsoft Partner Programme is designed to support all companies who provide solutions based upon Microsoft technology, by providing business development resources for sales and marketing initiatives, free on-line training tutorials, technical support and a partner web site with a whole host of support content including a knowledge base.

Becoming a Registered Member is free and involves simply completing an online registration form with details of the business and focus.

There are two further levels within the Partner Programme - the next level is the Certified Partner level and is intended for partners who want an even closer relationship with Microsoft. Along with the use of the elite Microsoft Certified Partner brand and logo, they have their own telephone account manager and access to key business resources such as free software licences for internal and developer use, free pre- and post-sales technical support, as well as sales and marketing material.

The criteria for Certified Partners is that they must either employ two Microsoft Certified Professionals or develop one eligible hardware or software solution, and have accrued 50 Partner Points. These

points can be obtained in a number of ways including technical certifications, attaining a Microsoft Competency or submitting customer references.

Microsoft Competencies define the partner's areas of specialisation and make it easier to align business skills with Microsoft marketing initiatives. The Competencies cover areas such as Advanced Infrastructure, Business Intelligence, Integrated e-business Solutions, ISV Solutions, Microsoft Business Solutions and Security Solutions.

The third level within the Partner Programme is Gold Certified, which signifies that the organisation has reached a special level of skill and competence. Qualification for this level requires 120 Partner Points and a specific Microsoft Competency.

Whichever level a company aspires to it is important in today's market that they show a real ability to deliver working business solutions. The Microsoft Partner Programme provides the opportunity for IT companies of all sizes and areas of focus to gain competence and credibility in this solutions market.

Suddenly you have a step up to this opportunity not a hurdle to cross.

For more information on the Microsoft Partner Programme, please visit:

www.microsoft.com/uk/partnerprogramme





Freddie Kavanagh

"We see the desktop as a niche play," said Freddie Kavanagh. "The only area where we are seeing a significant take up of our desktop version is in the structured worker environment. This is where the user has a limited number of applications and they are focused on key business issues. We are seeing no penetration in the power user space."

Paul Salazar also did not see the desktop as important as yet, "We are not heavily marketing in this area. Our next release will have all the fundamentals covered but we will still need more plug and play support to really worry Microsoft. We are

focusing much more on the corporate employee where functionality is low and desktop management is key."

As far as the channel is concerned the Linux players are convinced that there is a great opportunity. Paul Salazar explains, "The opportunity for the channel has gone from good to great. Linux is a stable, predictable base to run applications and now that the major ISVs are supporting it the opportunities will expand rapidly."

Freddie Kavanagh sees the opportunity is in services, "The real up side for the channel is in providing chargeable support services from advising clients, through managing the risk during the migration process to piloting projects and managing installations."

Microsoft

So if Linux is the hot property of 2005 where does that leave Microsoft.

In November 2004 Bill Gates outlined the product development roadmap for Microsoft and it showed a reasonably cautious approach.

In summary: the 1st half of 2005 will see first the release of Windows Server 2003 SP1 which will include reliability improvements to address top customer issues, security enhancements and a performance increase of up to 10 percent. This will also be the base for the Windows Server 2003 for 64-Bit Extended Systems/[windowsserver2003/64bit/extended/default.mspx](#) release.

Next will come the Windows Server 2003 for 64-Bit Extended Systems release which will allow an evolutionary path to 64-bit technology. This will be a single code-base providing AMD Opteron and Intel Xeon EM64T support.

There will also be a number of feature packs through Windows Update Services/[windowsserversystem/sus/](#)

[wusbeta.mspx](#).

The 2nd half of 2005 will see Windows Server 2003 "R2" Update, a streamlined and secure information access system for remote workers, trusted partners, and branch office users. Finally Windows Server "Longhorn" Beta 1 will be available and distributed to early adopter customers. However the list of features has been reduced in this first version from what was previously announced.

What Microsoft is focusing on for 2005 is the attack on the SME sector with its SBS 2003 product. It dominates the desktop and is a serious player in the enterprise. Where it feels it lacks penetration, and where it believes it can make a mark is in the Small Business Server market.

So in SBS 2003 it has bundled a whole host of applications to make the customer more effective at running its business, liaising with clients and allowing flexible working.

According to John Coultard, Director of Small Business, UK & Ireland at Microsoft, "SBS has been slow to take off in the UK but we are now seeing significant growth since our channel started to focus on the bundled Sharepoint software."

"SharePoint enables a single point of access to multiple systems such as Microsoft Office System programs, business intelligence and project management systems, and existing line-of-business applications, including third-party and industry-specific programs. If the partner can identify a need for this software then it is almost certain they will get the sale."

So 2005 looks like an interesting time at all levels of the O/S market, particularly in the SME and datacenter arenas. These are key areas that the channel need to get a grip on if they are to be true Solution Providers. ■