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QUESTION & ANSWER

IBM Linux GM: Enterprises beyond TCO questions with Linux

By Michael S. Mimoso, Senior News Editor
28 Jun 2004 | SearchOpenSource.com

Used to be that nobody got fired for buying IBM. Big Blue's Linux general manager Jim Stallings, whose job it is to champion Linux use in the enterprise, seems to think times are changing. In this interview, he explains that IT departments worldwide are having to defend the presence of proprietary technology and explain why Linux and open source aren't being used in-house.

Stallings cites ubiquitous Linux use in the financial services industry and increasing deployments in government settings where Unix, Windows NT and OS/2 are being phased out and agencies are "re-plumbing" with Linux. Recent high-profile desktop deals in Munich, Germany, and Bergen, Norway, are also giving Linux advocates reason to puff out their chests.

Here, Stallings also talks about IBM's Linux strategy and how it's going after Windows NT users, and he delves into the issue of intellectual property and patents.



Jim Stallings

Enterprise decision makers are more informed now about Linux than when IBM made its billion-dollar commitment to Linux in 2001. As you talk to customers, how have their IT strategies and questions around Linux changed?

Jim Stallings: Going back a year or so, most large enterprise customers had a Linux strategy, but it was limited to the outer circle, edge-of-network stuff. It was all about total cost of ownership and Unix-to-Linux migrations on the edge of network. Now, it's gone beyond TCO. It's about security, reliability and redeployment of skills, as Unix and Windows moves out and Linux

moves in. They want to know how to model their patch management processes, redeployment processes and when to update software.

Linux is the fastest growing operating system, and enterprises are building it into all

models going forward. If new applications are coming out, for example, they want to know why it's not available for Linux.

IT managers are having to defend their decisions to go on proprietary platforms.

Governments ask questions about reliability and security. They understand TCO; it's all about security.

We have fewer conversations where we have to evangelize Linux. We now have hardcore business models around Linux where they're starting projects on Linux and realizing faster TCO than if they start on Unix and port later [to Linux].

Customers are smarter about migration costs, and smart about leveraging the assets they've paid for. It makes sense.

Support is a perennial sticking point when it comes to Linux in the enterprise. Do customers want to ramp up their skill sets or are they buying services?

Stallings: Support is a big issue for customers. Customers want to scale up on the skill side. Customers say, 'We can do this migration, but when there's a problem, whom do we call?' IBM can help. Smaller outsourcers can help.

IT managers are having to defend their decisions to go on proprietary platforms.

Jim Stallings
Linux general manager,
IBM Corp.

Can you provide an update on IBM's NT-to-Linux migration program announced in January at LinuxWorld?

Stallings: It's popular. Microsoft is forcing this impending situation on its customers [Microsoft announced it will end support for Windows NT on Dec. 31]. You got to go over a cliff, you have to decide which boat you're going to get on. We had 60,000 migrations from NT to Linux in the first quarter. I haven't seen the second quarter numbers, but I would dare say it's going to be significantly higher -- and as we get closer to Dec. 31, it's going to jump higher.

One thing that's happening because of this NT situation is that customers are asking why not consider all their servers. Shops have a mix of Windows 2000 and Windows 2003 servers, why not sweep the floor and do a one-time cleanup? A lot of them figure they're going to Linux some day, why not now?

How concerned are customers about the intellectual property and patent threats raised against Linux by SCO and others?

Stallings: Customers have gotten very smart about this situation since [SCO's multibillion dollar suit] was launched against IBM last year. Thousands of CEOs got the letter threatening them with a lawsuit. It forced them to do due diligence. They are very current on this, and business is actually accelerating.

Businesses are realizing that open source is a collaborative model, which is obviously real different from the commercial software model. Businesses get the benefits of this collaboration and are moving more classes of workloads onto what has become a reliable alternative.

We hear questions about IP and we share what we know with them. The Linux community has also stepped forward with Linus Torvalds' Developer's Certificate of Origin that certifies contributors know the origin of their code and that it's not stolen. The community voluntarily addressed these concerns, and customers are very aware of what's going on.

Red Hat, SuSE and the OSDL [Open Source Development Lab], meanwhile, have offered ample protection, and I think you're going to see more in this area.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

IBM has had long-standing partnerships with Red Hat and SuSE. What is your take on Novell's acquisition of SuSE and

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its commitment to Linux?

Stallings: Novell's been a good IBM partner for 20 years. Given where Novell was and what they had to do — they've seen Linux adoption like we've seen it — Novell was faced with a set of business choices. Given the adoption of Linux — IDC [International Data Corp.] reported 63% growth in the fourth quarter — you can't ignore those

numbers. They chose Linux. Novell has good products that they are moving to the new platform. With SuSE as its distributor, they have the development capabilities and Novell services to do those migrations. It makes a lot of sense.

What's on IBM's Linux agenda for the next six months?

Stallings: You are going to continue to hear about continued investments to help customers protect their skills, and hear more about services and support.

Our Sector7 acquisition [IBM acquired application service porting provider Sector7 last September] specializes in migrating servers and desktops. We've built a migration factory, a set of tools to help move customers over.

You'll also hear more from IBM on helping customers on the desktop with IBM's Workplace client technology.

You'll also hear a lot more from us in emerging markets like China, India, Brazil and Korea. We have centers in each of those nations and those will be expanding there. There are massive numbers there.

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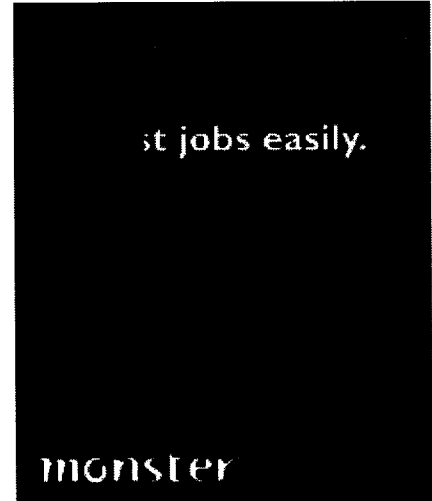
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