

Scarce support could stall Linux

Support is one of the major hurdles in the adoption of Linux and open source in enterprises. Let's look at this issue in more detail.

An enterprise wants its infrastructure to run seamlessly. This is true whether it is a corporate, government, defence, or an educational institute. An enterprise also wants long-term support to be readily available. Because of a perceived lack of support and the apprehension of greater implementation difficulty, many enterprises believe that open source is good for R&D and education but not for real life mission critical applications.

Various aspects that an enterprise considers when it judges a technology on support are explained below.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT OF VENDORS ON OPEN SOURCE PRODUCTS

Any enterprise wants open source vendors to have a long-term commitment towards their products, whether hardware or software. Once the applications are online, you cannot afford to go back and change platforms frequently. Open source has now reached a critical mass where vendors' commercial interests are being satisfied.



This will hopefully lead to sustainable open source products. Linux vendors like RedHat and SuSE and open source projects like Apache and Q-mail as well as traditional ISVs like Oracle and SAP are generating a critical level of respect from their users and are achieving an increased level of credibility for open source in the enterprise.

AVAILABILITY OF SUPPORT

Enterprises want easy and quick access to vendors and technical people who have sufficient expertise to take care of their problems. In the case of Microsoft or other proprietary solutions enterprises can take advantage of established avenues of support such as authorised service centres or even the company itself. Till now, open source has not offered these traditional avenues of support. Much of the support has been only available through alternative methods such as e-mail lists and search engines.

In open source, the support model is still evolving. Companies like IBM and HP are now providing more traditional models of support. But that is not enough. The support must be available at a reasonable cost, which can only be achieved through wider training and through more customer-service oriented commercial open source product and service providers.

STABILITY OF THE VENDORS SUPPORTING OPEN SOURCE

As open source becomes more popular, vendors will perceive an opportunity to derive long-term revenue. Through both expansion and consolidation, more vendors will emerge. Open source vendors can accelerate this transition by promoting forums for partners and standards for products and solutions.

SCALABILITY AND STABILITY OF THE PRODUCTS ON OPEN SOURCE

Many Internet open source products, such as Web servers and e-mail servers have reached a level of scalability and stability unrivalled even by most commercial competitors. In other arenas, high-quality proprietary products, such as Oracle and DB2, are now fully available and supported on open source platforms. Open source products such as MySQL and PostgreSQL are becoming contenders but require further maturity to be competitive across all enterprise segments. OpenOffice, while appropriate for many tasks, is perceived still to be inadequate in terms of integration and compatibility with Microsoft's mainline office tools.

AVAILABILITY OF APPLICATIONS ON LINUX

While many server applications have

become available and are supported on Linux, there still remains a lot of applications, especially on the desktop, that are not available. To raise the level of Linux acceptance in the enterprise, more product vendors must release, test, and support their products on all major versions of Linux.

HIGH-LEVEL SUPPORT COMPANIES ENDORSING LINUX

Support by big vendors like IBM and HP has boosted the acceptance of open source. Other companies, especially Linux distributors such as RedHat and SuSE must also increase the availability of their support across the globe using their own resources or through alliance partners.

INTEROPERABILITY BETWEEN VARIOUS LINUX DISTRIBUTIONS

The variety of Linux distributions with incompatible configuration, upgrade, and installation requirements have

impeded acceptance of Linux by the enterprise. The Linux Standard Base workgroup of the Free Standards Group addresses many key compatibility issues for developers and has facilitated product portability. However, there is still much work to be done to involve more product developers and to benefit a wider range of market segments including embedded systems, handhelds, and specialty markets.

Open source adoption is happening very fast and support is racing to meet the requirements of the enterprise. As open source begins to handle more mission critical applications, the requirements for support increases. Vendors who recognise these requirements as business opportunities will benefit in the long run. **LFY**

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