



Instant Insight
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IBM Expands Linux Strategy and Solutions

By Charles King

At LinuxWorld, IBM announced a series of new and updated Open Source products and strategies. Among the announcements were:

- IBM and Novell's SuSE Linux has achieved Controlled Access Protection Profile compliance for SuSE under The Common Criteria for Information Security Evaluation (CC), commonly referred to as CAPP/EAL3+, across the IBM entire eServer product line, as well as Opteron-based systems. IBM and SUSE LINUX also announced Common Operating Environment (COE) compliance on IBM xSeries and zSeries platforms with SUSE LINUX Enterprise Server 8, with support for pSeries and iSeries available in the first half of 2004.
- An expansion of ISV and customer support for IBM's Linux on POWER systems, including eServer pSeries and eServer iSeries solutions along with the company's recently introduced JS20 POWER blade servers. New IBM Linux on POWER customers include National Semiconductor, Kendall Jackson Wines, LexCom, Hitachi Global Storage, and SAP. ISVs including RedHat, Genaware, Selectica, SUSE, TECSYS, and LANSA are offering solutions for the Linux on POWER platform.
- New programs and supporting classes to help customers and business partners migrate from Windows NT to Linux. The programs are bolstered by expectations that Microsoft will discontinue support for Windows NT 4.0 as planned by the end of 2004, a move that IBM estimates will affect nearly 2 million users. The programs and support classes include Move2Lotus for users of Microsoft Exchange on NT, Migrate Now! which aims to move customers of Microsoft SQL Server to DB2, and Tivoli offerings that span security, systems, and network management areas.
- The newest release of IBM's Integrated Platform for e-business on eServer zSeries, which adds or updates key components for expanding portal usage and access integration with single sign-on through the use of z/VM, SUSE Linux Enterprise Server, IBM WebSphere Portal Enable or IBM WebSphere Application Server.

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For any company, growing business rests on expanding opportunities for your customers and partners, and seizing opportunities from your competitors. IBM's host of new and maturing Linux offerings richly fulfills most of those goals, with a couple of caveats.

Until a couple of years ago, Linux was largely a geek-friendly toy that was mostly the purview of IT staff and high tech hobbyists with too much idle time on their hands. However, the notable support for Linux among major IT vendors including IBM helped push Linux from its initial use as a cheap and effective Web server OS to an enterprise-class operating environment for most any business. However, to drive an emerging OS into the customer base, vendors need a featured platform as well as support from ISVs and partners. IBM's surprising spark plug for this effort has been its venerable mainframe platform, which has fully enjoyed the fruits of its Linux Extreme Makeover. While expanding portal usage and access integration features are fairly

minor bells and whistles, they also signal that IBM is not resting on its Linux on mainframe laurels, but is continuing to enhance the platform's functionality and performance.

More impressive are the expanded Linux on POWER offerings, especially the addition of support from Red Hat and new ISVs, and the public willingness of well-known customers like National Semiconductor, LexCom, Hitachi, and SAP to speak about their experience with the platform. In addition, the extension of Linux across IBM's RISC-based eServer pSeries line has strategic implications that touch the company's two main rivals, Sun and HP. Both companies support Linux, and HP's acquisition of Compaq made it the de facto leader in low-end Linux server sales. But neither HP nor Sun has supported high-end Linux solutions to the same extent as IBM. In fact, in the corporate datacenter, Sun continues to press its long-held Solaris on SPARC evangelism, and HP is increasingly morphing into a purveyor of 64-bit Wintanium solutions. IBM's willingness (at the customer's request, of course) to replace its home-grown AIX operating environment with Linux is one indication of Open Source solutions' growing momentum.

The implications of the recently announced JS20 blade server are also intriguing. Based on the POWER 970 chip core (which also drives Apple's G5 Macs and servers), IBM's positioning of the JS20 as a Linux-specific 64-bit solution fills an interesting hole in the company's BladeCenter solutions. Perhaps more importantly, the JS20 is hitting the streets about a year in advance of any similar Itanium-based solution, not encouraging news for either Intel or its good buddy HP. However, not every IBM solution has such smooth sailing ahead. While the company's NT migration offerings are interesting, they could be hampered unless ISV support for Linux continues growing at its current torrid pace. Then again, exactly when Microsoft will discontinue NT support remains uncertain. The plug on Windows 98 was scheduled to be pulled a week or so ago, but Microsoft made a last-minute call to extend support to 2006, a move that may have been influenced by the growing popularity and market traction of Linux solutions. While NT has only a fraction of Windows 98's estimated 39 million users, they are among the business clients Microsoft has been courting for the better part of a decade. As a result, we will not be especially surprised to if NT customers receive an end-of-year support reprieve.

If you cannot capitalize on your opponents' mistakes, then you have to create new opportunities for yourself, which is where IBM and SuSE's Common Criteria and COE compliance fits in. Linux' similarities to UNIX, its flexibility and customizability, and its low cost relative to proprietary solutions have made Open Source an increasingly popular choice for public sector applications. By achieving Common Criteria and COE compliance, IBM and SuSE have simply made it easier for potential clients who would be inclined to use Linux anyway to embrace it fully for a wide range of well-funded, security-sensitive government applications. While we do not expect to see these customers cited in an IBM press release anytime soon, rest assured that they will play key roles in the success of the company's ongoing Linux strategy.