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Linux gets an enterprise shove
By Scott Berinato, eWEEK
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Linux and open-source software continue to reach into all aspects of the enterprise. The latest announcements issue from the likes of Red Hat Software Inc., Lineo Inc., VA Linux Inc. and Covalent Technologies Inc.

Amid all the action, Sun Microsystems Inc. has opened its Solaris operating system under its own Community Source license, which hasn't received the popular support from the open-source community that one might expect.

Leading off the Linux news, Red Hat, of Durham, N.C., has released its first major upgrade to the Red Hat Linux distribution since the company went public in August.

Red Hat Linux 6.1 improves the installation process of the company's software and adds a "Red Hat Update Agent," which automatically detects upgrades and downloads them to the installed OS. The new version also adds support for LDAP (Lightweight Directory Access Protocol) and 128-bit encryption, officials said.

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Red Hat Linux 6.1 is available now in three iterations. The Basic package includes Sun's StarOffice suite and 90 days of e-mail support for $29.95. The Deluxe package adds 30 days of phone support and costs $79.95. The Professional package adds 30 days of Apache Web Server configuration support and costs $149.95.

Getting small

At the other end of the market, Caldera Systems Inc.'s sister company Lineo, of Orem, Utah, has outlined its road map for Embedix embedded Linux.

Lineo will take a three-pronged approach to the nascent embedded market by developing the Embedix OS, an embedded Linux software development kit and Embrowser, an embedded Web browser for network appliances such as set-top boxes.

Also, Lineo, which previously focused on embedded DOS as Caldera Thin Clients Inc., will spearhead an embedded Linux ISV program to encourage development of embedded applications such as minidatabases and Java applications for the Embedix platform, officials said.

Service and support

In the ever-important services realm, VA Linux, which sources say is very close to an initial public offering, has set up a professional services division.

VA is primarily a Linux hardware supplier, offering Linux servers and desktops on any of the major distributions. The Sunnyvale, Calif., company's services group will focus on five areas, officials said: planning, deployment, systems integration, performance analysis and security.

Elsewhere in the services realm, Covalent Technologies Inc., of Lincoln, Nebraska, is set to create a services group to support the Apache Web server. Covalent wants to be to Apache what LinuxCare aims to be for Linux, an independent source for enterprise support, officials said.

Covalent already makes e-commerce products for Apache, and its founder and CEO, Randy Terbush, is one of the founders of the Apache Software Foundation.

In a unique twist to the Linux/Apache support story, QuestionExchange.com will soon go live with an eBay-like auction approach to support.

QuestionExchange.com, now in beta, offers experts' advice on all matters Linux and Apache for users who name their price for the support. If the advice is accepted, the expert receives 95 percent of the money while the site owners, based in Boston, receive the remaining 5 percent.

Meanwhile, the mad dash to support Linux that resulted in Red Hat's highly successful IPO has spawned some startup companies as well. The latest is Mission Critical Linux LLC,

based in Lowell, Mass., which debuted this week. Officials say the company will eventually offer diagnostic and management tools for supporting Linux in non-stop application environments - where some enterprise users have been hesitant to apply the upstart OS.

While the company exists, its products aren't available yet. Mission Critical's Web site says only that they will be available "in the upcoming months."

Sun's spot

Although Linux and open source in general have created a bandwagon effect, it sometimes happens that a vendor jumping on doesn't receive the blessings of the upstart community.

Sun, of Palo Alto, Calif., is facing just such a situation at the moment. The company had mulled for months whether to release its Solaris operating system under an open-source-like license. On Friday it confirmed that it would.

Solaris will be freely available under the Community Source license, which applies to Java as well. But to many open-source developers, this isn't really open source code at all, since the license dictates that any products emerging from a user's tampering with the code are subject to licensing fees paid to Solaris' owner Sun.

"Their license is useful -- it lets you look at the code of their products, which might be very handy in an educational environment," said an open-source user posting as "Shadowlion" on Slashdot.org. "But for real-world work, it's only a good license if you don't mind handing all your work back to Sun."

Netscape Communications Corp. has a similar license for its Mozilla open-source browser project. Under the Netscape Public License, developers must pay licensing fees to Netscape on products that emerge from use of the source code. More than a year after its inception, Mozilla has been unable to ship Netscape Communicator 5.0 largely due to slow development and apathy on the part of open-source developers who don't like working under those constrictions.

Red Hat is at www.redhat.com. Lineo is at www.lineo.com. Covalent can be reached at www.covalent.net. Mission Critical Linux is at www.missioncriticallinux.com. Sun is at www.sun.com.

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