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A Patchy Start; Apache's Strong

by [Michelle Finley](#)

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Apache is the Web's most widely used and -- outside of the Nerd Zone -- its most unknown application.

It has achieved dominance in a crucial market that Microsoft and Netscape have struggled mightily to conquer. Both companies have invested massive amounts of money and programming skills into server software programs -- and yet it's Apache, a freeware application, that is installed on just [over half of all publicly accessible Web servers](#).

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Given those facts, and compared to the open-source rage known as Linux, Apache should have been the subject of a major media blitz by now. Instead it remains largely an unsung success.

[Linux Magazine](#) executive editor Robert McMillan thinks that Linux is better known than Apache partly because Linux has that dramatic story of "a whiz-kid college student [Linus Torvalds] from a foreign country who goes to work for an [ultra-secretive company](#) [Transmeta] that may or may not take on Intel, while exerting a 'benevolent

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dictator's' level of control over an operating system [Linux] that may or may not destroy Microsoft."

Apache, on the other hand, got its start just like many other open-source software projects did.

Eight programmers with an interest in doing more with a common software application -- the NCSA Web server that had originally been developed by Rob McCool -- found each other on the Net and began exchanging ideas, changes, and fixes.

At first the group referred to their project by the joke name "A Patchy Server" -- in reference to the patches they were applying to the NCSA server to add features and fixes. Ultimately, the Apache name was formally adopted out of respect for the Native American tribe ... and the eight programmers became known as the Apache Group.

"The Apache people's societal structure is much like our own development model in that we do not have a particular leader or 'chief' for the project," said Randy Terbush, one of the original eight A Patchy Server developers, and the CEO of [Covalent Technologies](#), which supports the Apache.

Terbush speculates that Apache has gone relatively unnoticed while Linux has received major attention because the Apache Group has not been prone to evangelize the results of their project.

"Our goals as a group are varied, but overall our aim has been to drive the HTTP standard and offer a robust piece of software that speaks for itself," Terbush said. "In the end, the acceptance of Apache seems to show that we have been successful in that goal."

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McMillan seconds that idea. "When a company as conservative as IBM drops its own Web server to adopt Apache, you really have to take notice," he said.

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