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## Taking Care of Business

Fee-based tech support may make Linux an easier sell to corporate America

 By Maggie Biggs  
 November 09, 1999

Service and support is now the mantra for more and more corporations. Good internal S&S means workers are more efficient and profitable. Good S&S for customers means happier customers who keep coming back and buying more, and that means fatter profits.

But support comes in many flavors. There's a growing trend toward outsourcing service and support functions. Many companies routinely purchase plans from third parties that manage in-house help desks or operate customer call centers.

### IN THIS ARTICLE

- » [Introduction](#)
- » [Taking Care of Linux](#)
- » [Apache 1st: A Peek](#)

But what about support for your network operating system or Web server software? If you use commercial products, you probably get (and maybe paid for) vendor support from the likes of a Novell, Microsoft, or IBM.

But if you're using open source software (OSS), such as Linux or Apache, service and support isn't a given. In fact, getting help can be a challenge, which is one reason some major corporations have been leery of using open source products.


Since OSS is developed by many different people instead of a single entity, getting support means browsing newsgroups, FAQs, and developer-written documentation. But that's changing. Third-party companies are now offering more formalized, fee-based support plans for open source products, complete with 24/7 phone, Web, and e-mail support.


But do these support plans match the quality and coverage of commercial software vendors? Are they a good value? In an attempt to answer these questions, I decided to check out Linuxcare Inc.'s Linuxcare and Covalent Technologies' Apache 1st Support. The first supports nearly all major Linux distributions and related software (such as TurboLinux Cluster). The second provides support for the Apache Web server.

If you're looking for powerhouse online knowledgebases and manuals, look elsewhere--maybe to your Linux or Apache documentation. But if you need to reach Linux or Apache pros who can solve network or Web conundrums, these two services are well worth exploring. Both have expertise and response times that rival commercial software providers.

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