

Challenges for the Open Source Community

The open source movement is spreading, but not fast enough. What are the major barriers to rapid growth? Let's take a look.

The open source movement may have gained momentum in recent years, but operating system vendors, ISVs, system integrators and system vendors need to urgently address certain concerns in the open source domain to make this movement stronger and more widely accepted.

According to a Forrester report released in March 2003, Linux adoption is set to explode in 2004. Linux is already well entrenched in such applications as Web servers, e-mail servers, and is fast catching up in other areas such as desktop and application servers. The success of Linux is today being equated with the success of the open source community. Projects such as Apache Web server and Samba have been major milestones in the success path of the open source community. But, there is still a long way to go. If the open source movement has to continue its success march and wants to be accepted seamlessly in the enterprise market, there are certain challenges it must address.

ENTERPRISE SUPPORT

Around 46 per cent of the respondents interviewed for the Forrester study thought lack of enterprise support was the biggest hurdle in spreading the use of Linux and open source. This study was carried on a sample of over 50 companies with turnovers of over US\$ 1 billion. There are many Linux distributions, such as Red Hat and SuSE, which are giving enterprise support. In addition, there are vendors on-board such as Dell, HP and IBM, which are providing Linux support, and there are ISVs such as Oracle, SAP, Vignette, which are now supporting

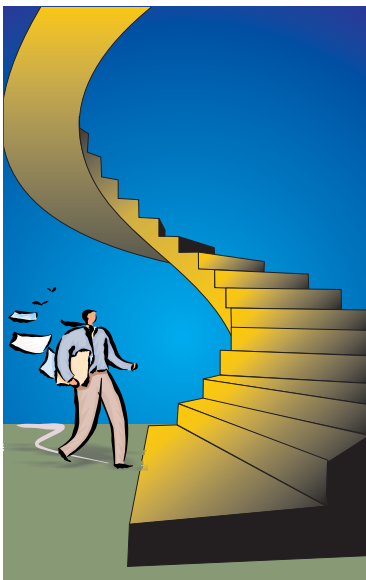
Linux by porting their products to it. But, there is a very big vacuum in the field of system integrators actively promoting open source software. Greater availability of quality system integrators is one of the key needs for more widespread adoption of Linux by enterprises.

DESKTOP SCENARIO

Linux is mostly being used in Web/e-mail application, infrastructure, client and data functionality. It is now also being used in desktop applications, but only to a limited extent. At present, it is used primarily on desktops, which use e-mail and Internet access, and not high-end documentation. If Linux is to be successful in the desktop segment, Linux developers have to ensure that it will be easy to move from Windows to Linux. Also, all the existing files in Windows applications, such as MS Excel and MS Word, have to seamlessly work on Linux. There are many Linux distributors, who are actively taking care of this aspect, and soon Linux distributions should be available, along with other open source applications, without these gaps.

OPERATING SYSTEM MATURITY

Operating system maturity is another major issue in quicker Linux adoption. Linux is considered to be too new to be adopted immediately. And a plethora of versions from different vendors have added to the chaos. Linux vendors will have to take great care of this, as this puts a major hurdle in the interoperability of different versions. Applications running on one version of Linux might not run on other. Portability of Linux on various hardware platforms also needs to be taken care of. Linux vendors have to make



sure that their versions run on most of the platforms available today. The open source community needs to build up symmetry between applications and hardware platforms.

MANAGEABILITY

The open source community has to make sure that the software it offers is easy to manage. Manageability is very critical in enterprises as it directly affects the cost of ownership. The real cost of any operating system or application is not only the purchase cost, but also the maintenance cost over the years. To keep this cost down, the software must be manageable. This issue is less critical in the server segment, as there are generally many technical people looking after a network of servers. It's far more critical in the desktop segment where even a slight apprehension in the minds of end users can have a negative effect on its adoption. Both operating system

vendors and software vendors have to address the issue sincerely. Better manageability will result in direct reduction in the cost of ownership, and improve the acceptability of the software.

FOCUS ON REAL-WORLD SOFTWARE

The open source community needs to also focus on real-world software. Open source is readily accepted in mailing/proxy/web server type environments. But when it comes to application support such as word processors, spreadsheets and graphics, its presence is not yet satisfactory. Linux applications need to run well in the real production environment, rather than in test environments. This will go a long way in shifting open source to mainstream software rapidly.

Linux vendors, enterprise users and the open source community should take the following measures to improve

the implementation and acceptance of Linux:

- There should be a proper migration plan for applications, and this should not be done hastily.
- Linux needs to be given care at par with commercial software, while developing and implementing support, documentation and patch updates.
- Enterprises need to standardise their hardware configurations to allow seamless deployment across the enterprise.
- In enterprises, Linux needs to be a part of the same management environment, such as Veritas and Opsware.

Users and the open source community have to understand that open source will not be adopted in a day. A proper roadmap has to be first drawn up, and then followed. **LFY**

The author is Director, Tetra Information Service Pvt Ltd.



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TAURUS
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582, Syndicate Bank Road, Binnamangala Post, Indiranagar First Stage, BANGALORE 560 038.
Ph.: 5202072. Fax: 91-80-5215291. E-mail: taurus@blr.vsnl.net.in Website: www.taurusonline.net

