

MAC MYSTERIES

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,



Joe Casad, Editor in Chief

Quiet waves of trepidation have rippled through the Linux community since Apple's very interesting announcement that they will move OS X to the Intel chip. Of course, not everyone is running scared. Many of the Linux faithful are brashly confident that Linux will weather anything. But occasional voices are calling out in blogs, zines, and letters that we should be paying attention to

this latest bite from Apple.

When the story broke, some commentators speculated that Apple's move may not be as big as it sounded. Perhaps they would continue on in their tightly controlled hardware universe, with some form of specialized PPC-like processor made under license by Intel. If so, the situation would not be so different from what it is now.

The story that is emerging, though, is not so clear. Apple has begun to ship the Apple Developer Platform ADP2.1 hardware system to Macintosh developers, and word is that the system does indeed contain a conventional Pentium 4 processor, not a specialized Apple-only chip. If Apple is using the same chip everyone else is using, the bloggers wonder, does that mean they are giving up their special universe for a chance to compete directly for a share of the Intel desktop market? If so, what will this mean for the evolving Linux desktop market?

The argument is that Apple, a legendary pioneer of desktop computing, has a unified message and a uniform, easy-to-use Unix-based system with, according to some, fewer quirks than desktop Linux. The bloggers wonder if this attack on the desktop market will wash away all the gains that Linux has made and supplant Linux as an alternative to Windows.

This question is very relevant to the Linux community, although the answer may be more than a little ambiguous. Think Secret (<http://www.thinksecret.com>), a Mac world web magazine, recently ran a review of the Intel Mac development system.

According to the review, by senior editor Ryan Katz, the Apple development system has a 3.6 Ghz Pentium 4 processor. Windows XP apparently installed easily on the Intel Mac, but – and here's the interesting part – the Intel-based version of Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger that accompanied the system did not install at all when Katz tried

to set it up on a Dell. A message stated that “the hardware configuration is not supported by Darwin x86.”

Some sources have reported that Apple doesn't even want OS X to run on non-Apple hardware. According to Think Secret, Apple may even install a chip in the Mac motherboard that OS X will need to handshake with before installing, which would rule out any use of OS X on ordinary PC hardware. If this is true, it would indicate that Apple is still using its software as a way to support its hardware, which means they may not be ready to engulf Linux after all.

But are they just trying to fly under the radar? Will there be a frontal assault after they get a foothold? That's when the “hardware configuration not supported” message comes into focus. Apple has built up a reputation for a smooth, easy, reliable operating system – all with systems running on their own hardware. If they ever decide to enter the wild, open melee of the run-on-anything PC market, they would soon find that they were spending a much higher percentage of their time working down under the system, at the hardware level.

In fact, if they did so, they would soon discover that they possessed neither the chief advantage of Linux (the superior Open Source development model) nor the chief advantage of Windows (monopolist power to enforce compliance from hardware vendors). And maybe that's why they may be content to just bring the Intel chip back home with them to their cozy MacUniverse.

Joe

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