

HAT CHECK

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,



Joe Casad, Editor in Chief

Something about the mood of LinuxWorld is different at every show. The booths and the technical sessions are becoming more similar all the time, but usually there is some kind of buzz spreading around – the hot news of the show – which is often a new initiative or a new company appearing at the event. Strangely, the big news this year wasn't about a new company appearing – it was about a company not

appearing. To the profound fascination of visitors, exhibitors, and the experts in the press room, Red Hat did not have a booth at this year's San Francisco LinuxWorld.

Several equally speculative explanations circulated through the halls. Although rumors spoke of an impending merger or acquisition, the prevailing opinion was that Red Hat was simply weary of fighting an arms race with much larger companies over high-profile booth space. Red Hat always had a bigger space than the various management appliance companies and anti-virus vendors, but they never really competed with the lavish Babylonian gardens of IBM, HP, and Novell.

As some observers point out, Red Hat's position in North America is currently so strong that they may have decided they cannot win and can only lose by showing up at an event like LinuxWorld. Their situation resembles the case of a front-running political candidate who tries to avoid a direct debate with a lesser-known opponent because the debate will make them appear as equals. Red Hat and Novell/Suse always set up close to each other at these events, with Novell giving away more hats and generally projecting the greater share of glitz. The side-by-side pairing creates the impression that Suse and Red Hat are equally competitive and successful, which is certainly not true in this part of the world. I have taken Red Hat to task in the past for letting Novell steal the media spotlight with better and more energetic press relations, but in this case, I would have to agree that throwing trinkets and conspicuously consuming huge portions of pavilion space do nothing to advance the fortunes of Red Hat.

The big loser in this episode is the LinuxWorld show itself. They'll have a harder time claiming that LinuxWorld is the place to go to learn what is happening in Linux when the biggest Linux vendor doesn't even have a booth. Of course, one could argue that they brought this on themselves by charging too much for floor space, but other indicators imply that no one is really getting rich on this year's show.

Visitors missed the chance to learn about the latest developments in Red Hat products, which is significant because a large percentage of the LinuxWorld visitors work on some form of Red Hat system. But many of us also missed Red Hat for aesthetic reasons. Red Hat always seems just a little more studious and serious than their counterparts. Their presentations are typically more relevant to Linux and less lost in the soup of middleware dished up by the other players.

Red Hat's Fedora project did have a booth in the place of non-profits known as the .org Pavilion. Those who had the bright idea of asking the Fedora people what happened to Red Hat got to read a photocopy of a handwritten message that said Red Hat has decided to concentrate their energies on other industry events. So maybe that's all there is to it, or maybe there is more to the story. You might know more when you read this page than I know as I am writing it, but from where I am now, I can say, the show wasn't the same without Red Hat.

Joe

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