

LinuxCon Lessons

A first-hand look at the state of journalism, passing the Mom Test, and the LinuxCon 2010 battle of the Nerds vs. the Geeks. *By Rikki Kite*



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The Linux Foundation held its second annual LinuxCon USA in Boston, Massachusetts, August 10-12. The event included minisummits, a small expo floor, and three days of keynotes, talks, and tutorials. Check out our site for some video and news from the event [1].

One session that got great reviews from attendees was *Hype vs. Reality: Today's Linux Story from the Media's Perspective*. The panel was made up of respected veteran tech journalists Joe "Zonker" Brockmeier, Jason Brooks, Sean Michael Kerner, Ryan Paul, and Steven Vaughan-Nicols.

Vaughan-Nicols eloquently explained the state of journalism, saying, "Reporters have a problem today because we're driven not by what we think is important but by what people will read. That means if we want to make a living doing any coverage, we have to spend time on popular stories, not important stories. Now, all of us on this panel fight to write the important stories, but it's a challenge as time goes by" [2].

During the discussion, a couple of attendees asked questions with reference to the *Mom Test* [3]. I couldn't help but wonder: Mom Test? Can you be more specific, please? Does the Mom Test refer to my, yours, or some other mom? No two moms are alike.

My mother passed away several years ago, but I like to think she would have loved many things about Linux, especially if using it meant that her PC wouldn't be crippled by malware like it was when she died. Mom loved being hands-on, which is why my siblings and I enjoyed cakes baked from scratch and wore handmade Halloween costumes – it's also why I was the only kid in my gym class with a hand-embroidered name on my uniform. Clearly GNU/Linux passes the Mom Test in my house, and I'm sure ZaReason CEO Cathy Malmrose and GNOME Foundation Executive Director Stormy Peters would agree that it passes the Mom Test in their homes. Is there a Dad Test? If so, my dad would tell you that Ubuntu failed it in his house. Perhaps it fares better with

you or your dad, but what does that Dad Test mean?

Linux and open source are straight-A students in the Virgin Airlines Test, as CIO Ravi Simhambhatla explained in his *Selling the Value of Open Source When Cost Is Not the Driver* LinuxCon keynote [4]. "We didn't put open source in because it was free; we put it in because it just works," he says.

I spoke with Simhambhatla after his talk and told him how exciting it is to hear that Virgin Airlines embraces open source technologies. Then I told him about my photographer friend Trina Baker. Trina uses Photoshop for some of her projects, but she also uses GIMP. She doesn't use a free, open source application because she needs to or has to – she uses it because she likes it [5].

Later upstairs, I sat on the victorious Nerd team in the LinuxCon Golden Penguin Bowl with Novell's James Bottomley and Linux Foundation's John Hawley. I'm sorry to say I answered one trivia question correctly by attributing a quote to Bristol Palin. I then apologized to the audience for knowing that answer. I was reminded of what Steven Vaughan-Nicols said on the press panel – sadly, the state of American journalism isn't nearly as healthy as open source tech journalism. ■■■

LIKEABLE LINKS

- [1] LinuxCon 2010 Interview with Philip Odenca, Black Duck Software: <http://www.linuxpromagazine.com/Online/News/linuxconphilipodence>
- [2] OpenSource.com Hype vs. Reality coverage: <http://opensource.com/life/10/8/hype-vs-reality-todays-linux-story-medias-perspective-linux-con-panel>
- [3] *It's Time to Retire the Mom Test*, by Joe "Zonker" Brockmeier: <http://www.linux.com/archive/feed/118863>
- [4] *Virgin America CIO Touts Open Source Value*, by Sean Michael Kerner: <http://www.internetnews.com/software/article.php/3898331>
- [5] Gallery 32: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/redlyongirl/>