TO THE TEST

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,

Joe Casad, Editor in Chief

In the old days, system administrators learned their craft from older and wiser admins. Of course, in those days, duty rosters were drawn around the ratio of several administrators for a single computer, so there were many chances for mentoring moments. As we all know, a changed occurred somewhere overnight, and suddenly the scenario was more like several computers for a single admin. System admins were suddenly less like stokers tending a furnace and more like shepherds tending a flock. The big companies still had teams of admins, but more and more small companies wanted to invest in hardware, and they wanted to pay some outsider to come set it up.

The software companies, meanwhile, were rapidly inventing tools for PC networking, and, to extend the shepherd analogy, every year or two, the systems these admins tended would morph into totally new and unexpected varieties of sheep.

When the sheep are mutating that quickly, there isn't much point in learning their ways through some quaint ritual of rural osmosis. Vendors soon realized they needed a standard, methodical means of delivering curriculum to professionals, and potential employers realized they needed an unambiguous measure of technical expertise.

These forces gave rise to the network certification industry. Companies like Sun, Novell, and Microsoft invested heavily in their certification programs, because by investing in certification, they knew they were really investing in their products.

Some would argue that Linux isn't that kind of a thing – that it isn't, or shouldn't be, a product that can be compared to the systems that evolved in the corporate board rooms. But if you look closely at the conversation that takes place within a single small company with a limited budget and no in-house expert, you'll realize the perils of a situation that comes to a choice between a Microsoft engineer who is "certified" and a Linux engineer who isn't. If Linux is going to compete for corporate accounts, the Linux community needs some universal measure of technical merit.

No single Linux company has the kind of money to throw at certification that Microsoft, IBM, or Novell had in their primes. Red Hat developed a successful testing program that is similar to the other vendor-based programs, but the communal nature of Linux leads to the need for a platform-independent certification system, and Linux Professional Institute (LPI) has filled that niche since its founding in 1999.

As you may know, LPI is a non-profit international organization that supports vendor-neutral certification for Linux professionals. LPI certification programs are delivered worldwide in seven languages. The LPI exam set is still evolving. Currently, two levels of certification are available, and a third is on the way. Visit the LPI website at *http://www.lpi.org* if you're interested in LPI certification options.

All this brings me to the real news, which is that Linux Magazine has become a Platinum sponsor of LPI. We are proud to be affiliated at LPI, an organization that, like Linux Magazine, is committed to disseminating information on Linux and raising the worldwide level of Linux expertise.

We are big supporters of LPI, and we hope this expanded sponsorship helps them go farther and reach new Linux users.

Joe