

Remembering LinuxWorld UK

SANDALS AND SUITS

This year's UK LinuxWorld brought out the usual blend of speeches, products, conference sessions, and aisle antics. **BY ROGER WHITTAKER**

The Linux exhibition at Olympia is a regular high point on the London calendar for Linux enthusiasts. The show now operates under the LinuxWorld banner and offers a conference alongside the free exhibition. This year's event took place on October 25th and 26th. The attendees were the usual varied bunch. There were plenty of beards, and at least some sandals were clearly visible, but so were a good number of suits.

The Show

The general look of the show was similar to previous years. As you might expect, the large stands were those of Novell, HP, IBM, and Oracle. These large booths were surrounded by many smaller stands belonging to smaller companies. Red Hat did not have a booth, and they had only a tiny presence at the IBM pavilion. But the news that came out overnight between the two days of the show brought their name into sharp focus.

On Wednesday, all the talk was about what would be announced by Oracle overnight. Most people seemed to believe that Oracle would be announcing a deal with Canonical to make Ubuntu its preferred Linux distribution. On Thursday morning, however, news came that Oracle would, instead, provide their own

enterprise-level support for a Red Hat-derived Linux product in direct competition with Red Hat. This news was the talk of the show, and there was a lot of speculation and discussion about the likely impact on the Linux market.

As is usual at these events, some exhibitors used eye-catching gimmicks to draw attention. Rackspace had a radio-controlled airship flying up to the roof of the hall. Qube Networks featured a group of Maoris performing the haka (hacker, get it?), a performance that was loud and spectacular. Positive Internet's excellent giraffe man was seen walking around the show from time to time, and he even joined the Maoris for a dance.

The Conference

Throughout the two days of the show, the parallel conference was going on downstairs. Talks were given by some big names, including Jon "maddog" Hall, Alan Cox, Bdale Garvee, and Jeremy Allison. Michael Meeks spoke about the current state of the Linux desktop. Ian Pratt spoke on "Xen in the Enterprise," and Google's Chris DiBona discussed their "Summer of Code" initiative.

The conference sessions took place in what I can only describe as tents, which were not ideal, particularly from the

point of soundproofing. Also included were a few master classes, as well as free business briefings and the lunchtime "Great Linux Debate."

Building Community

On Wednesday evening, a large contingent made their way to various local pubs and restaurants. Those with invitations attended the awards dinner.

There were some murmurs that certain vendors were questioning the purpose of attending Linux World, judging purely on a financial "return on investment" based on the conversion of leads gained at the show. But LinuxWorld is not the kind of show that people attend to make immediate purchasing decisions. It's a place where people go to improve the quality of their background knowledge, gage the quality of the various vendors, and interact with others who share an interest in Linux and Free and Open Source Software.

LinuxWorld also provides the vendors with a way of interacting with the community, and that's important, because people who use Linux are not just "consumers" of software – they are part of a community. Vendors need to cherish and encourage that sense of community for the benefit it provides and the trust it engenders. ■



Figure 1: From my vantage point at the Novell booth, where I was representing Novell Technical Services and demonstrating Suse Linux, I could see that this year's show was the usual mix of products, technical sessions, and spontaneous theater.