MORE SUN

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,

As I pointed out back in the March issue, things are getting interesting over at Sun Micro-systems. Sun's purchase of MySQL a few months ago put them back in the sights of industry watchers. No one knows whether these recent moves will ever put Sun back in the lead, but at least they are playing the game.

Joe Casad, Editor in Chief

The latest news from Sun was definitely one of the more interesting developments this month. Sun has agreed to certify several of their servers for Ubuntu Linux, becoming the first major hardware vendor to certify Ubuntu. They have also put out a version of the complete Java stack for Ubuntu. The Java stack appeared in Ubuntu's Multiverse repository for the Ubuntu 7.04 release.

According to the Ubuntu website, "This was the first time an entire, production-quality Java stack with tooling was included in an open source GNU/Linux distribution, greatly simplifying the process for Linux developers and users to access Java technology."

The move creates new competition for Novell and Red Hat, who have their own certification deals with various hardware vendors. If this gambit wins some market share back for Sun, it will be sweet revenge against Red Hat for taking the spot that Solaris held a few years ago. The bloggers were buzzing about what this might mean for Ubuntu, Red Hat, and all the many SUSE sisters, but I'm more interested in what it means for OpenSolaris.

When Sun announced they were going to open the Solaris code, the community (justifiably) wondered what they might mean by "open." Since then, the Free Software Foundation has indeed certified OpenSolaris Common Development and Distribution License (CDDL) as a free license, although FSF points out that the CDDL is not compatible with the GPL. Because Solaris is a Unix-based system, most of the open source software that runs on Linux can efficiently adapt to OpenSolaris, raising the possibility of a new kernel war to see which system will play host to the myriad of open source applications and services.

This showdown might be what Sun ultimately has in mind for the long run, but it looks like they are wise enough to know they're not ready for it yet and they are better off proceeding with multiple alternatives. Of course, Linux versions have run on Sun hardware for years, and the Debian Sparc port is practically an institution. Sun even had its own customized Linux for a while, and they have flirted with the big Linux vendors over possible licensing arrangements in the past. But this deal with Ubuntu adds a whole new harmony to the theme of Sun/Linux integration.

Blogger Sean Michael Kerner points out that the arrangements between Sun and Canonical have actually been in place for a while now, and that the recent developments are part of an evolving relationship that goes back a couple years. The recent round of headlines apparently arose in response to some comments by Ubuntu founder Mark Shuttleworth confirming a trend that close observers already knew.

Whether this development is this year's news or last year's news, it still counts as recent history in the 26-year saga of Sun Microsystems. The fact that they are certifying their systems for Ubuntu – and even tooling the Java stack for Ubuntu – means they are not betting everything on OpenSolaris, which is better for Linux, and ultimately better for Sun.

Joe

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