Miguel de Icazza

DELIVERING
INTELLIGENCE

RICHARD IBBOTSON

Miguel de Icazza began his life in the south side of Mexico city. He certainly didn't think that he would eventually become one of the leading lights of the Open Source and Free Software movement of the early 21st century.

Miguel is the founder of the Gnome Foundation and a board member of the Free Software Foundation. He is presently CTO of Ximian. Ximian was previously Helixcode, which Miguel co-founded with Nat Freidman. Miguel has known Nat for a long time from the *Linux.net* IRC network. The idea to create a company that would work on GNOME came from Nat in early 1999 (for those of us who don't know, GNOME means GNU Object Model Environment). GNOME is a sub-project of the GNU

project. Helixcode came into being to make GNOME more accessible and to extend the GUI environment for the Linux desktop. Miguel always likes to explain that the GNU/Linux desktop is the place where we need to improve user friendliness and on other Unices as well. He likes to think that his own younger brother could use a Linux desktop without a problem.

Last year Helixcode was the company that was at the centre of the GNOME object model. Both Sun

To contact Ximian in the States
Ximian, Inc.
401 Park Drive, 3 West
Boston, MA 02215
General information: hello@ximian.com
Investor information: exec@ximian.com
Sales: sales@ximian.com
Distribution: distribution@ximian.com
Words and pictures by Richard Ibbotson, the Chairman of Sheffield Linux User's Group. You can view their site at *www.sheflug.co.uk*. Sheffield Linux User's Group is sponsored by SuSE Ltd at Borehamwood *http://www.suse.co.uk*.

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Microsystems and the Free Software Foundation were and are interested in their ideas. The Red Hat labs also did quite a bit of work with Helixcode. Eliot Lee is the person to speak to if you want to know more about that. Much more development work is in progress and we expect more in the future. Sun Microsystems worked closely with Miguel on Star Office. Quite a few of the Star Office components use software that is based around the GNOME project. Sun have taken their Star Office suite and given it away as Open Office. This means that a free office suite will be made available and the code can be changed by anyone who wants to join in with the Open Office project. This will in fact preserve all of the ideas and principles that were part of the Original Star Office project before Sun got hold of it.

At the time of writing, Ximian GNOME has just come into being. Many of us expect great developments in GNOME in the future.

One of the main objectives of the GNOME project was to provide a graphical user interface that would make Unix and Linux more accessible. Miguel has personally put his best efforts into popularising the Linux desktop phenomenon and to make Unix user friendly rather than the kind of thing that only highly-educated technicians can understand. A trip to the Gnome site will reveal that there are applications such as Gnome Office and others like Gernel which make kernel configuration a point and click experience for those of us who aren't Linux developers. A fine example of GNOME software is an application called Evolution. It looks a lot like Outlook Express but without all that Microsoft nastiness included. Some Linux developers see the command line as the only way to work, but how will the end user understand anything about the command line? As Miguel explained to me over the phone from his office in Massachusetts, "As things stand Unix is sucking very badly. We need to make it more attractive to the general user rather than leave it as a developer's environment where only academics may tread. Further development of Gnome components will lead to greater ease of use and even my own younger brother will be able to understand how to use Linux". I also asked him about office suites: "This is part of the Bonobo thing. In future both Open Office and Gnome Office will come together and be a part of the same project".

Ximian and the products that it advertises are all set to become a major success. It has already been selected by Hewlett-Packard as the desktop software that will come preloaded on all HP-UX workstations. Ximian also have a new finance officer – Tod Miceli. They have secured $15m funding for their projects. The CEO of the company is David Patrick, who has spent the past twenty years marketing and selling software. He is the best choice for the job of integrating free software into the American and international business community. Nat Freidman, who was one of the founders of Ximian, will become the Vice President of Product Development. This will provide a more rounded structure to the company's management team.

Gnome 1.4 has just been released in its final version. You might want to download it and try it. There are also official Ximian CDs available, in nicely finished jewel cases with the Ximian logo on the front. Where did the picture of the monkey come from? You can get those from Ximian as well.

Gnome 2.0 is at the planning stage. Miguel has published his own ideas about this on the Web for public consumption. GNOME 1.4 introduced a number of interesting new technologies. GNOME 2.0 looks as though it might repair some of the things that are broken just now and will most likely lead to something quite different, but similar. Miguel himself has a belief that we shouldn't break things if they are not already broken.

Miguel would like the following information to be made public – the Bonobo chimps are also known as the Pigmy Chimpanzees and they live in the Congo, but they are in danger of becoming extinct. I encourage you to visit *http://www.gsu.edu/~wwwbpf/bpf/* for more information on them and the ways in which you can help save them. ∎