

RED HAT 7.1 GURU DAY

JOHN SOUTHERN

Red Hat recently held a Guru day to show off the features of its new release that are often missed.

Planting a flag

The day started with a talk by Alan Cox setting out why Free Software matters. Timing is everything and only that week both Eazel and BRU had both folded. This amply showed the advantage of open source in that we have the code for Nautilus and so its development can continue, whereas BRU, although an excellent product, was proprietary and so we are unlikely ever to see the source or move development forward.

After a quick look at the US vs European patent law, Alan moved onto the history and culture of Open Source.

This may appear to have had little to do with Red Hat 7.1, until it finally sinks in that Red Hat truly believes in Open Source as a social code, not just a business model — they are not just willing to tick the boxes agreeing to OS, but also to live and work the dream.

Smooth and secure

The day then continued with a hands-on look at the new boxed set. Red Hat do have a slight upper hand compared to other distributors in that they employ eight out of the top ten kernel developers. This means that the developers who would know how to break it, test the RH distribution.

Compared to version 7.0 the latest release has moved on with some dramatic new features. Most of this is due to the 2.4 kernel being incorporated. Little features such as the SMP scalability being increased to 8 processors and 64GB RAM support may not appeal to most users, but it does mean that RH is looking both to the future and the Enterprise market.

Like most of the new distributions the graphical install was painless and I was most impressed by the KickStart feature which allows a setup to be predefined so re-installing is completely automated.

New configuration tools made setting up Apache, BIND and ADSL easier. It was nice to see

Ogg Vorbis being supported along with a whole raft of additional security features.

A very brief overview was then given of Stronghold and Interchange. Stronghold is Red Hat's new secure Web server based on Apache with additional security. Interchange is developed from the E-commerce software by Akopia. Very flexible, fast and with a choice of options ranging from payment acceptance methods to databases.

The Red Hat Network gives the ability of simple updates and system configuration. My initial fears that this would force users to either pay or do without the updates were met with disbelief. It was categorically stated that Red Hat will always offer all updates free via FTP as it always has done.

The day went very quickly and aroused sufficient interest for me to have finally taken the plunge and converted to Red Hat. All painless, especially the printer and graphics card support. The only package that I have since upgraded has been Gnome from 1.2 to 1.4

Overall, I would recommend Red Hat 7.1 and having been shown some of the little features that normally you skip over I am now quite biased and proud of it. ■

