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I was going to write about Steve Ballmer the Microsoft CEO calling Linux a cancer, but their latest missive for the retail industry is far funnier. They have produced a white paper on why the retail industry should not use Linux. Split into ten different areas, it is more humorous than my daily UserFriendly cartoon. Each section is filled with lies and untruths.

For example in one section they complain that Linux has so many installation versions. This is obviously bad to Microsoft as they say 'with so many different distributions available, there are bound to be proprietaries introduced beyond the free operating system to allow vendors to distinguish themselves.' Hmmm choice is bad then. Never mind that Microsoft's whole ethos is about introducing proprietary technology.

'Microsoft, unlike Linux, has one standard graphical user interface across its limited number of operating systems.' So one size fits all and again choice is a bad thing.

In the section – Less Secure :'"Open source" means that anyone can get a copy of the source code. Developers can find security weaknesses very easily with Linux. The same is not true with Microsoft Windows.'

To be honest they are correct. We do get the source and we do find security weaknesses. Unfortunately they then miss the point by a mile. We also post fixes and are open about problems. If everyone knows then it is harder to exploit. The same cannot be said for Microsoft. It is all very well for me to read about problems in my TechNet subscription but the majority of people do not know and so can be compromised.

They do raise some good points such as limited device driver support and untested waters in retail. Device drivers are always a problem as Linux has not yet caught all the hardware developers support. Untested waters is both a disadvantage with no previous market penetration but also an advantage as we have not yet made errors in the market.

Although the paper is aimed at persuading buyers to steer clear of Linux, I think most are bright enough to read between the lines for themselves.

Happy hacking

John Southern, Editor