UK's largest Linux Exhibition and Conference

A chance to meet BY COLIN MURPHY

The 9 and 10 October saw London's Olympia exhibition hall once again playing host to Linux Expo UK, sponsored in part by Linux Magazine.

The Linux market is still in a state of flux, the same state it was to be found in last year. But last year Linux had much hype to live up to and the Linux Expo event failed to draw the crowds most had hoped for.

This years event was smaller, taking the 1st floor of Olympia hall 2, and was run in conjuction with WebSolutions Expo taking the ground floor. This was an interesting combination because it went on to highlight the growing number of Web Application providers that are starting to use Linux for their day to day business, with some even considering themselves to be on the wrong floor once the expo had started.

One such company was Jool Ltd, whose MD, Anjula Perera, took time to tell me about his range of Linux powered servers and the success they had using their smallest server to power a major application, running the network services of the Labour Party conference in Blackpool. Their *Kwartz* servers, which stand out from the crowd because of their unusual 270x190x160mm form factor and brushed Aluminium and Perspex finish, was able to cope with over 2,500 trans- actions through the Oracle application it was handling.

While the event was smaller, there was a definite buzz of excitement for the two days. As was the case last year, space was set aside for the Open Source and community element that Linux relies on so heavily. The Debian team must have given away lots of Knoppix 3.1 disks, which will prove to be an excellent introduction to those who wanted to see some of the power that a Linux distribution can put

forward with the minimum of fuss, as it is able to boot and run completely from the CD-ROM, no installation to a hard disk is necessary.

Sharp had pitched in with the Greater London Linux User Group to help pass on their new Linux PDA, the SL-5500 at a considerable discount, while the guys on the Lonix stand showed off their true colours by spending most of the two days playing Unreal Tournament 2003 and inviting passers by to join them for drinks after the show.

The developers from the Rosegarden project were on hand, showing how Linux was capable of making it in the music studio with their composition and sequencing applications.

Helping friends

The show had attracted some of the biggest players in the IT industry, with Sun and HP both showing off their ranges of Linux servers and applications. Their large stands helped to accom- modated some of the other vendors. Sun had given over room for people like SuSE and SCO. Some people may find it hard to imagine why competing companies, at least for the moment, are prepared to share stand space together. I see it in an opposite light and find it refreshing that

partnerships and strategic alliances can stand together.

Enterprise Management Consulting told us about their new development of 'The Linux Centre', a purpose built call centre to house up to 40 technical support staff. Technical support is one of the major issues that seem to hold back prospective migration. Initiatives like 'The Linux Centre' must add weight to the total solutions that corporate business demand from their systems, proving that Linux really can be considered as an alternative.

Business case

The Expo organisers had a fiendish plan for a rolling conference talks which fell into three tracks, the first of these tracks was to take part in the 'Enterprise Linux Case Study Theatre', which allowed the senior IT decision makers, those with the cheque books, to evaluate the possibilities Linux might offer their business operations.

The 'Product Education Theatre', the second of these tracks gave vendors the chance to speak to groups of inter- ested punters, pitching their products. Practical, hands on advice and help was available from the third track, made up of the user groups and developer community. This seemed to work well, but many of the big name vendors also had set up facilities for their close partners to do the same, as part of their own stands. This made it difficult to catch all of the presentations one might have wanted to, but it did alleviate the desperate crushes experienced last year in the all too small theatre.

No one seemed disappoin- ted to have attended the event, there was a real buzz and people thought they were on the crest of something big. I'm looking forward to the next expo.