

No one expected a big boost from the world's largest computer fair CeBIT (http://www.cebit.de/home_page_e), held 12th to 19th March in Hannover, Germany. Hence not even a decline in numbers of visitors by 17 percent (560,000 vs. 674,000 in 2002) would shock exhibitors. Instead, people were pleased to find competent dialog partners and space to freely wander around.

While there was no lack of the first in the LinuxPark area where Linux-related companies gathered around the LinuxForum lecture theater often did get very cramped there.

Talks, talks, talks

On each of the eight days a continuous sequence of Linux and Open Source-related talks and discussions were held. Most of the speakers were well-known within the community: Among them – to name only a few – were GnuPG mastermind Werner Koch, Ximian's Nat Friedman, Martin Konold of the Kroupware project and Knoppix inventor Klaus Knopper. As if this wasn't enough, the LinuxPark in cooperation with Linux International and the Open Source Exchange Program organized an additional one-day Open Source conference in the quieter atmosphere of the fair's Convention Center on Monday, 17th March. Unlike for the lectures at the LinuxForum, a simultaneous translation service via headset was available, so attendees could follow the talks in English or German, respectively.

Jon "maddog" Hall's introductory keynote on the current state of Linux and Open Source (and its potential to make the world a just place by fostering local economies instead of a few American software companies) at an early 9 am attracted about a hundred listeners. Only



Figure 1: Don't expect to find a spare seat at the LinuxForum!

CeBIT 2003

Linux attracts

The boom is over, and even at large computer fairs like the CeBIT in Hannover, Germany, visitors get their feet on the ground again without kicking their neighbor. But watch out when Linux comes into play!

BY PATRICIA JUNG

Lars Eilebrecht of the Apache Security Team was able to top this: About 160 attendees eagerly listened to a very informative and well-presented talk about the "Apache Web Server Security Secrets". Unfortunately, the remaining five one-hour lectures weren't equally popular.

Project stars

But talks weren't the only way to make Open Source projects visible on the fair-ground. The LinuxPark hosted the so-called "Open Booth" where three or four Open Source projects per day met a numerous and interested audience. Among them were the usual suspects like KDE, GNOME, Apache and Samba, but also lesser known ones like AGNULA (a project to develop a totally free Linux distro for audio and multimedia purposes, <http://www.agnula.org/>), the Video Disk Recorder (<http://www.cadsoft.de/vdr/>), GPE (<http://gpe.handhelds.org/>), and even Open and NetBSD.

The OPIE project, (<http://opie.handhelds.org/>) developing a free replacement for Trolltech's Qtopia graphical environment for PDAs, showed its progress and the KDE synchronisation application KitchenSync. Apart from showcasing at the Open Booth, the project had a full-time presence at Sharp's booth. Finally the developers went home with a new test device: the ultra-cool Zaurus SL-C700 which still doesn't have a release date for Europe.

Other projects weren't as fortunate. Even though e.g. UMLinux (<http://www.umlinux.de/>) hidden among other research presences in silent hall 11 would not complain about a lack of interest, they often suffered from only being found accidentally.

The Open Source Exchange Pavilion hosted another concentration of Linux and Open Source-related companies and organizations: Here, for example, Linux International and the Linux Professional Institute had their booths. Those who wished to take LPI exams 101 and 201 could do so on five days for an attractive price of only 20 EUR.

The Linux International presence, however, didn't live up the importance of the organization. Although "maddog" and LI do a good job of making the business case for Linux, their show presence still harks back to the "hackers-only" days where technical knowledge was the only important aspect. Someone not familiar with the community is unlikely to stop and ask for information if the booth personnel are busy hacking and no information material is visible. For the sake of the community, please guys, update your presence for next year!

Now guess what was CeBIT's probably most popular give-away! Watching Klaus Knopper besieged by CD hunters, the answer was clear, however happy SuSE or Red Hat were with their CeBIT presence, the distro star in Hannover was most certainly Knoppix! ■



Figure 2: Peaceful coexistence: even the *BSD folks were welcome at the Open Booth