

It was certainly not the kind of event where you would find out about the fate of some brilliant patch pending for the upcoming developer kernel. This show was about getting things done with Linux, primarily in an enterprise setting, though public sector deployment (government and education) also received due attention.

As a consequence, the exhibition floor was dominated by companies providing enterprise solutions with Linux. First and foremost, it's Hewlett-Packard offering a very wide range of products and services, ranging from Linux training all the way to custom-built supercomputers. From the list of big names that made their brand long before Linux, Oracle, Sun, IBM and Apple are certainly worth mentioning. All of them staged an impressive presence, showing strong support for Linux in almost every aspect of their business activities.

In a delightful contrast with the early years of Linux tradeshows, where the presenters were either "suits" pushing marketing-talk and totally unable to answer technical questions, or "geeks" all too happy to talk about minute technical details and missing the big picture altogether, at this show one could attend several very professional presentations, and have all technical questions competently answered thereafter.

An especially pleasant surprise was meeting Holger Dyroff, general manager of SuSE for the Americas, who personally staffed the SuSE booth, talked to visitors on the show floor, while being a surprisingly "one of us" kind of guy, without a suit, equally knowledgeable about technical and business issues. He



Figure 1: Friendly, helpful booths

Real World Linux 2003 Toronto

The Real World

The Real World Linux Conference and Expo in Toronto^[1], Canada is a business oriented trade-show and conference, aiming at bringing together Linux businesses and their potential customers. Unfortunately, the event was overshadowed by the WHO SARS warning, resulting in a much lower than expected turnout. **BY DANIEL A. NAGY**

elucidated the development and package maintenance process within SuSE as well as the company's hiring policies and its international presence, while successfully marketing their new products.

On the hardware side, the two buzzwords of this show were blade servers and thin clients, while of course there was no shortage of old-school clusters of rack-mounted servers and stand-alone servers of this kind. Blade servers are the building bricks of modern day supercomputers – huge racks of removable compact servers integrated onto single boards. Vendors offer them for roles as diverse as number-crunching supercomputers and secure and reliable data centers. Competition is hot, driving prices down and quality up.

Thin clients are book-sized desktop computers, without noisy moving parts such as hard-drives or fans, usually deployed as intelligent terminals and/or clients for a powerful central server on the local area network. The functionality once unique to Sun Ray clients based on proprietary software and network protocols is now materializing in (almost) commodity hardware and (almost) entirely free software solutions, while prices are kept at bay by healthy competition. Needless to say that it's Linux that makes both these very big and very small machines tick.

Apple, while not (yet?) basing its operating system on Linux, goes to great lengths to appeal to Linux-users and the Free Software community in general. Source releases, development tools, Linux-integration and all sorts of other desserts come with the world's most beautiful computers. A great departure

from the old days of the "don't touch" Macintosh philosophy, indeed.

It is truly delighting to see that the vendors of all sorts of enterprise-level peripherals from poster-size ink-jet printers to various mass-storage solutions now do pay attention to Linux and try hard to make their products work seamlessly with the free operating system. Unfortunately, these same vendors still maintain that the market for Linux peripherals for home and small office use is not there yet. By answering an HP



Figure 2: Business meets customers

questionnaire, you could win an HP digital camera with no Linux driver available for it, and no plans for such in the foreseeable future.

Summarizing, if you were interested in the trends shaping the future of Linux in the business environment, it would have been a really bad idea to give in to the SARS scare and not attend. An appropriate Torvalds quote would be this one: "...the Linux philosophy is 'laugh in the face of danger.' Oops. Wrong one. 'Do it yourself.' That's it." ■

INFO

[1] <http://www.realworldlinux.com>