World News

Home-brew: A South African Linux Distribution

It took the Gauteng Linux Users Group (GLUG), and other South African Linux activists forming "The Impi League" three years and three attempts to create a South African Linux distribution dedicated "to all South Africans". The proud survivor of this testing ground, living proof "that Africans can be self determined in the digital world" (as spokesman Ross Addis puts it), goes by the name of "Impi Linux", and was recently released as version 1.13. Its name, "impi", refers to a warrior regiment in the armies of the warrior king Shaka Zulu (1785–1828) and his successors.

Being an Open Source project, the desktop distribution does not attempt to reinvent the wheel but is based on Debian, borrows components from Knoppix, and ships with GNOME, OpenOffice and Mozilla.

One notable native South African addition is Cubit, a Web-based Open Source accounting and business software package. You can either use the distribution as a live CD, or install by clicking the install icon on the desktop (alternatively installation at boot-time is possible).

There is still a huge translation effort required to fulfill the promise of being available in all eleven official South African languages Afrikaans, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, Zulu, and English. Unlike many other distros, Impi Linux already has an operating 24/7 telephone support center which can be reached via South Africa's conventional telephone network. ■

http://www.impi.org.za/
ftp://ftp.is.co.za/linux/distributions/
impi/impi_1.13.iso
http://www.glug.org.za/
http://www.cubit.co.za/

Trademark Battle Extends

Dutch Lindows-retailer de Vries Computer Systems, a one-man company, got the scare of his life when Microsoft phoned him announcing that he would be involved in the trademark dispute between Lindows and Microsoft. The company promised a visit to explain the case and to convince him not to retail the desktop-Linux anymore. At least four other companies got a similar phone call. Instead of removing the product from his catalog, Hans de Vries turned to Lindows, and CEO Michael Robertson promised to miss his Thanksgiving Day and stand by his business partner.

Microsoft confirms the story. "Trademarks have to be protected in each and every nation in order not to lose your rights.", says Robert de Moll, spokesperson for Microsoft, "Since Lindows has no office in the Netherlands, we have to pursue the case with the dealers." However, when the media picked up on the story, Microsoft decided not to go ahead with the case. Robertson postponed his visit to early December when he announced a US$ 50,000 defense fund each for dealers in the Netherlands and Sweden. This was following a verdict by the Stockholm city court 10th December prohibiting Lindows from using the Lindows, Lindows.com and LindowsOS trademarks until the case had been finally settled. The defense fund is to be raised by selling Lindows life-time memberships. ■

Linux Goes Business in Asia

"Adopting Linux in the Enterprise" was the theme of the LinuxWorld Conference and Expo Hongkong 4th and 5th November, 2003, and they meant it: When it debuted in March 1999, LinuxWorld San Francisco was the domain of developers. Of the almost 1,300 visitors of its 2003 Asia Pacific counterpart, about 55 per cent were directors, CIOs and CTOs.

Accordingly, the conference agenda focussed on management and business talks, and most of them were held by management and sales representatives of global players and big companies with a regional focus like the Thiz Technology Group (known for the ThizLinux products) or China's Red Flag Software Company.

Hence, instead of the latest developments of the Linux kernel or desktop environments, the conference talks featured business products like Red Hat Enterprise Linux 3 and Oracle, buzzwords like high-availability, backup and recovery, and carried headlines like "The business and economics of Linux and Open Source" or "Linux – an indispensable component for running profitable business in small and medium enterprises, enterprise or government bodies".

Catering to the huge demand for Linux certification especially in Asia (see also Issue 36, p13), the Linux Professional

Institute held exam labs on both conference days in cooperation with the LPI Hong Kong . ■

http://www.linuxworld-hk.com/

■ Developer Conferences Specialize

As Linux goes mainstream, Linux conferences become increasingly specialized: GNOME users and developers will meet at the GUADEC in Kristiansand/Norway 28th to 30th June 2004 (see Issue 38, p13), and for August or September, their KDE counterparts are busily planning the 2004 KDE Conference at the Film Academy in Ludwigsburg, a small German town near the city of Stuttgart.

But to organize a conference, it's not actually necessary to work on one common project – there is an obvious trend towards developer conferences focussing on one particular topic: For example, the German Unix Users Group (GUUG) announced a "Free Software/Open Source Telephony Summit" 16th to 20th January 2004 in Geilenkirchen/Germany, thus providing a venue where developers from projects like Gnome-Meeting, Bayonne or Linphone can meet, hack and exchange information in the course of a three-day workshop, a conference, and a subsequent tutorial day.

Developers interested in audio and music applications can look forward to meet at the "2nd Linux Audio Developers Conference" 29th April to 2nd May, 2004. Again it is the turn of a German city, Karlsruhe, to play host for the event. Among the projects that will be presented there, are Aeolus (a GPLed church organ program), ALSA of course, and Ardour. ■
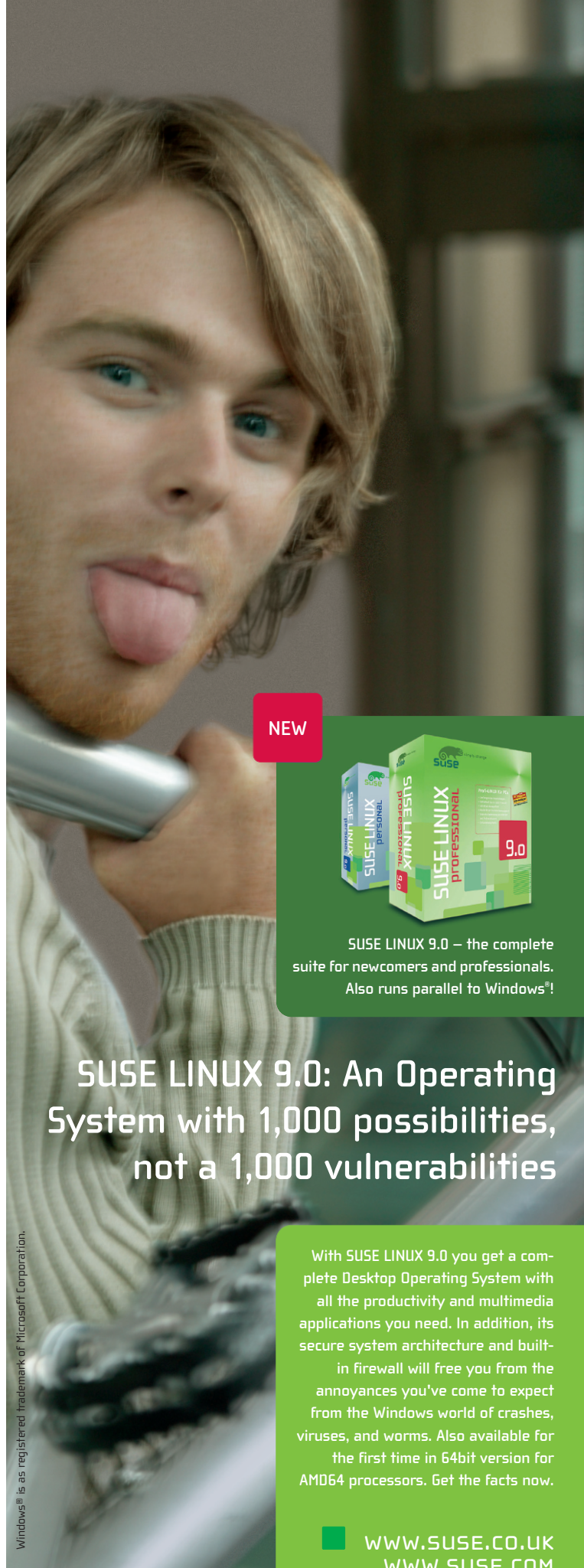
http://2004.guadec.org/
http://linuxwiki.org/KDEkonferenz
https://mail.kde.org/mailman/listinfo/kde-conference
http://www.guug.de/veranstaltungen/telephony-summit-2004/
http://www.zkm.de/lad

■ Islands for Linux

Sometimes the so called developed countries of the "First World" can learn a lot from so called developing countries, for example when it comes to the deployment of Open Source. So it came as no surprise when Brazilian Open Source proponents shared their experiences with their Portuguese hosts, during the 1st Azores Linux Workshop at the University of the Azores in Sao Miguel November 29, 2003.

While Rubens Queiróz de Almeida of the Campinas State University gave general introductions to Linux and Open Source, Marcelo Branco, a representative of the Porto Alegre City Council, spoke about free software in Brazil in general, pointing out the governmental decision to adopt Open Source software solutions all over the country. His presence finally lead to a technology transfer cooperation agreement between the Porto Alegre City Council and Terra-Mar Virtualazores, an association for local development in the Azores, which intends to involve the Azores government.

This, however, was not the only practical outcome of the workshop that ended with a Linux installation party on November 30. Adetti, a Lisbon-based non-profit organization for the development of IT and telecommunication techniques, and Terra-Mar Virtualazores agreed on the creation of a Linux Azores Abilities Center. So it looks like Linux has gained a foothold in Portugal. ■

http://www.linuxazores.org/