$2.50

MUUGlines

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This Month's Meeting – A Look at Java

Ben Li, from the Red River Community College, will be giving a presentation on Java. This will be a brief introduction to the Java language, including how to create applets and applications, similarities and differences between the two, and a demonstration of these. Ben will also talk about some of the tools that are available for helping in the creation of Java programs.

Please note our new (hopefully permanent) meeting location. This month, we'll be meeting at IBM Canada's offices in the TD Centre, at the corner of Portage and Main. We'll gather in the lobby on the main floor – please try to be there by about 7:15 PM. Steve Moffat will then take us up to the meeting room just before the meeting starts at 7:30. Don't be late, or you may not get in.

Parking is available either in the parkade behind the TD building, off Albert Street, or in the ground level lot just north of the TD building. Entrance to the lot is from Albert Street, behind the parkade. Either way, parking is a $1.25 flat rate for the evening. You purchase your ticket from a dispenser, so make sure you've got exact change – a loonie and a quarter, or 5 quarters.

Next Month

The following is a tentative outline of next month's meeting:

June 10, 1997: PC Interconnectivity with Linux

Linux networking is not limited to TCP/IP and the common services you find on most UNIX boxes. It also provides lots of client- and server-side support for interconnectivity with PC networks, such as Netware and SMB-based networks (as used by MS LAN Manager, Windows for Workgroups, and Windows 95). This month, we'll take a look at Linux's support for these, and how Linux can play a role in a predominantly PC network environment. Watch this space for more details to follow.

CALDERA RELEASES OPENDOS KERNEL SOURCE TO THE INTERNET

Distribution of OpenDOS Kernel Unprecedented in Computer Industry

PROVO, UT—April 30, 1997—Caldera Inc. today announced that it will release (via FTP and CD ROM) its OpenDOS kernel source on May 5, 1997. This release makes software history by freely distributing the source code to the most popular operating system in the world. Far from dead, DOS is still the underlying programming architecture found on high and low-end PCs worldwide. According to the CI (Computer Intelligence) Consumer Technology Index, 1996, nearly 68% of all used and acquired PCs, are 386 or lower. Research from Goldman Sachs underscores that statistic, citing an estimated PC installed base of 85 million: 25 million running 486's and 386's with an additional 37 million running 286's.

Caldera's release of the OpenDOS kernel source and OpenDOS 7.01 binaries to the Internet allows companies and individuals to use and develop OpenDOS for future use in their own products. OpenDOS also enhances the ability of embedded systems like Network Computers, NetPCs, kiosks, etc. by allowing OEMs and VARs to use well-known technology as a base for their own solutions.

"The DOS kernel source allows everyone from OEMs to end users to customize OpenDOS technology for their own specific needs," commented Bryan Sparks, President and CEO for Caldera Inc. "They can create their own innovative and low-cost custom solutions. All users benefit by being able to optimize investments in existing hardware and applications."

OpenDOS source and OpenDOS binaries are free, and may be downloaded for educational and non-commercial use.

By providing the source and binaries to the OS technology that fueled the PC revolution, Caldera supports the efforts of educators worldwide to increase technology comprehension at all levels.

The OpenDOS binary is based on DOS 7 technology acquired by Caldera from Novell in 1996, and provides a mainstream, no-cost OS for research and education.

OpenDOS also provides a complete operating system supporting all DOS-based applications and low-cost commercial integration into the OpenLinux environment for OpenLinux users. In addition, it is fully compatible with MS-DOS and supports Microsoft Windows (3.1 and 3.11), and networking systems that include Novell NetWare, Windows for Workgroups and LANtastic. The OpenDOS kernel source, OpenDOS 7.01, Caldera Source Usage License with full HTML user and programmer documentation, plus floppy disk install options are all included on the CD-ROM. (Floppy disks may be created from disk images contained on the CD for installation on PCs without CD-ROMs.) A commercial license for OpenDOS may be obtained by purchasing the CD-ROM.

Price, Availability and Support: The Caldera kernel source

and OpenDOS 7.01 will be available at a special introductory price of $19.99 (in the US and Canada) until June, 15 1997. After June 15, 1997, the CD-ROM containing both components will be sold for $29.99 US. Volume commercial licenses are also available.

Caldera does not provide users of OpenDOS with technical support via E-mail, telephone or other means, beyond the free support offered from the Caldera web site at: http://www.caldera.com/.

To purchase the CD containing the OpenDOS kernel source and OpenDOS 7.01, and for more information about Caldera products and technologies, please call +1 (800) 850-7779 in the United States, +44 (0) 1264 333600 in Europe, or +1 (801) 269-7012 outside of the United States and Europe.

Please send E-mail to "orders@caldera.com" and visit Caldera's web site at http://www.caldera.com/

Caldera, Inc. provides economical solutions that glue and extend new and existing computer systems, including NetWare , Sun Solaris, SCO UNIX , Novell IntraNetWare, and Microsoft Windows NT , to each other and the Internet. Caldera uses its own technological and marketing resources to leverage technologies including the Linux operating system created by independent developers worldwide, and the OpenDOS product line. For more information about Caldera products and technologies, please call +1 (800) 850-7779 in the United States, +44 (0) 1264 333600 in Europe, or +1 (801) 269-7012 outside of the United States and Europe.

SOLID desktop for Linux offered free of charge to developers

Solid Information Technology Ltd today announced a campaign targeted at the community of Linux developers. Between March and September 1997 Linux enthusiasts will be presented with a free personal version of the robust SQL database engine SOLID Server. Numerous commercial and non-commercial web sites are joining Solid Information Technology Ltd in this program by letting their web visitors download the free SOLID Desktop from their site.

Linus Torvalds, the creator of Linux, comments on the initiative: "This generous offer from Solid is warmly welcomed in the Linux community, and I share the enthusiasm of my fellow Linux developers around the globe. Solid's campaign manifests the mutual benefits commercial and non-commercial groups may have."

"With this campaign we want to show our appreciation of the voluntary efforts that are so characteristic of the Linux community," states Artturi Tarjanne, President of Solid Information Technology Ltd. "In just a few years, Linux has grown from an academic exercise into a commercially viable solution. Today, some of the hottest software development projects on earth are Linux based. Those highly mission-critical systems need a robust, commercial database management system, and we've got it. And if anybody is in doubt regarding the care-free nature of SOLID Server, we offer free technical support until the end of April 1997."

The SOLID Desktop for Linux is offered free of charge for anyone to download from numerous web sites around the world. The licence is for personal and development use. Solid offers free technical support until the end of April 1997. Users can at any time choose to upgrade the software to the commercially available SOLID Server for client/server applications and SOLID Web Engine for web applications. SOLID Server is also available on other Unix systems and on all Windows platforms.

SOLID Server is a unique product by Solid Information Technology Ltd, a privately held innovator of breakthrough database technologies. SOLID Server database components are in embedded use in web sites, diesel engines, elevator control systems, point of sale systems, travel agency systems, sales force automation systems, and many more.

Further information

To download your own copy of SOLID Desktop for Linux, access http://www.solidtech.com/linuxfre.htm to find a site near you. Free technical support over e-mail is available until the end of April 1997 at mailto:linux-support@solidtech.com.

For other inquiries, please contact Mr Iko Rein, mailto: iko.rein@solidtech.com or fax to +358-9-4774 7390. Solid Information Technology Ltd, http://www.solidtech.com.

SOLID Server is a trademark and the SOLID logo is a registered trademark of Solid Information Technology Ltd.

Linux Gets Bad Press?

By now, many of you will have already seen, or at least heard of, an article about Linux in the London *Sunday Times*, on April 20th, 1997. This article was, to say the least, definitely unflattering to Linux and its users.

If you haven't seen the article, it can be found on the Web at The Times Internet Edition (http://www.the-times.co.uk/news/pages/sti/97/04/20/stiinnsnd01001.html?1007000).

The article calls Linux a "nasty piece of digital scurf" that can only

appeal to "a certain breed of bug-eyed computer user," and suggests that people "avoid it at all costs."

Any article that dismisses Linux as a passing fad is clearly misinformed and potentially harmful to the reputation of Linux as a serious operating system. So what's the best way to respond to this article?

Not at all.

As Bruce Perens, Debian Project Leader, says:

"I urge Linux users and developers to *not* respond to this article. When you're in a fight with an idiot, it's difficult for other people to tell which one the idiot is." (from comp.os.linux.announce)

Keep in mind that Linux has experienced bad press before. When Bill Machrone made some minor factual errors in a less than glowing article about Linux, he says:

"I started receiving E-mails from Linux users minutes after my column was posted on PC Week Online, informing me of my mistake. [...] They got nasty. One of the subject lines read: "You're a dork." Another message began with, "You're a moron. Plain and simple" [...]

"Which makes me ponder anew why people adopt this damned-if-you-do, damned-if-you-don't attitude. Perhaps some Linux advocates regard it as their private club. Maybe they don't want mainstream attention." (From Up Periscope, in PC Week [http://www.pcweek.com/opinion/1104/04mach.html])

The Linux community shouldn't let history repeat itself. The thrust of David Hewson's article in the *Times* is that all Linux users are immature geeks. If we respond to him with the venom we may feel his article deserves, then that's exactly how we'll look, and we'll have played right into his hands.

If you do feel the need to respond, make sure your responses are:

- calm
- reasonable
- factual
- polite
- free from insults and profanity

Make sure that the *Times* realizes that the Linux community is composed of rational adults. Respond to his article in a way that will show Linux users in a good light, or please, for all our sakes — don't respond at all.

Thank you.
Michael Montoure

(P.S. I've just received a copy of a letter sent to the Times by Professor Attila Mate, of Brooklyn College, that I feel represents a good approach to take with this issue, and with his permission, I've reproduced it here.)

To respond to the Sunday Times article, you can reach David Hewson at an77@dial.pipex.net or the Times editors at editor@the-times.co.uk.

Linux, the PC program from hell

David Hewson, London Sunday Times

WAS I the only one who broke into a scream of terror when I looked at this month's copy of Personal Computer World? There, staring out from a free CD-Rom on the cover was the program from hell, and all you needed to do to let it take over your PC was double click a couple of times and kiss goodbye to your sanity.

The nasty piece of digital scurf in question is known as Linux and there are plenty of sad types who will tell you it is the future of personal computing. Do not fall for this bizarre line in geek thinking.

Even Personal Computer World, after making it so easy to enter the twilight zone without a return ticket, saw fit to enter a few caveats in the fine print. Linux, it said, came with a serious health warning. Don't even think about it, the magazine said, unless you are technically proficient and have backed up all your PC files beforehand.

Yes, but we know what the average PC user is like. He never reads the words, he just slings in the CD-Rom, clicks on the install icon, and hopes for the best. And if you are now looking at a blank screen with a few impenetrable commands where you once had a working PC, then all I can say is: "You have only yourself to blame."

Linux, for the uninitiated, is a version of that old computer donkey known as Unix. If you need to run big computer Unix tasks then it is, I am told, not a bad solution at all. Equally, if you believe there is no point in doing easily something you can achieve the long way round, it is doubtless the way to go.

Imagine a tougher version of MS-Dos – where the commands are even harder to memorise and less forgiving of errors – and you are starting to get there. And if you want to cheat a little, you can put on a pseudo-graphical front end and – bingo – you might just manage to turn a modern Windows NT-capable PC into a passable imitation of Windows 3.1 circa 1992.

However, to read some publications, you might think that Microsoft's Bill Gates is quivering in his boots at the idea that Linux will do what IBM and Apple never managed to achieve – kick Windows off the everyday desktop. Really? Well, no. Linux is flavour of the month with the geek community for two reasons – it's free, and it's not from Microsoft.

For a certain breed of bug-eyed

computer user, that really is all you need. Trivial details such as usability, the lack of decent everyday software, and the plain fact that, when things go wrong, you are on your own are not setbacks to Linux addicts. These are the very reasons why they like the wretched thing – because it sets them apart from the mainstream of tedious, ordinary users who just use PCs to get on with the job.

Personal computers seem to have attracted some strange and obsessive people along the way to becoming common or garden information tools. If Linux hadn't been invented by a Finnish student a few years back, something equally strange and esoteric would have appeared to take its place.

Computer geeks despise simple, common standards. Gates is the object of their hate simply because he won the operating-system war. If Apple or IBM had come out on top, the people now buzzing so excitedly around Linux would have treated them to the hate mail they reserve for Gates today.

Fads like Linux are diversionary characters in a digital freak show on the sidelines of modern information technology. Finding them on the cover disks of mainstream magazines says more about the novelty value of computer journalism than the real issues facing those trying to make tomorrow's PCs a sight better than the ones we use today.

The idea that great developments in personal computing will be invented in some dismal student bedroom in Helsinki might make nice bedtime reading for people who dream in hexa-decimal. But if all you want is a computer that you can aspire to understand, chuck that blasted CD-Rom in the bin right now.

One reader's response

Dear Sir/Madam:

I would like to comment on David Hewson's article in the April 20, 1997 issue of the Sunday Times, in the Sounding Off column, entitled "Linux, the PC program from hell."

I prefer to avoid any comment on the grossly abusive language in the article, except to say that such language is unworthy of your highly respected newspaper. I would, however, like to point out that the author seems to be misinformed on many of the issues he writes about in the article. Firstly, installing any operating system on a computer is somewhat painful. The computers most people buy come with the operating system already preinstalled, so one does not usually have to go through this pain. Usually, the preinstalled operating system is something like Windows 95 or Windows NT, but one can also buy computers with Linux preinstalled.

Often people have several operating systems running on their computers, since different operating systems have different advantages. If your computer came with one operating system, installing a second one is always very painful: one usually has to back up the existing operating system, then partition the disk (which normally erases all information), and then reinstall both operating systems — so the pain Mr. Hewson experienced when he tried to install Linux on a computer that already had an operating system running on it had nothing to do with Linux at all.

I have been using Unix for over ten years, and my opinion is that Unix (of which Linux is a variant) is the best operating environment on computers. As comparisons are often made between Unix and the standard PC operating systems, let me express my views about how these compare: it is perhaps easier to learn the Graphical User Interface of the standard PC operating system than the command line interface of Unix, but once one has made the effort to learn about the operating system, in Unix one can work much faster and more efficiently.

Linux is packaged in different ways, and the packaging may affect the difficulty of installation. How much the CD-Rom Mr. Hewson used influenced him in his opinion about Linux I do not know. But he might take note that Red Hat Linux 4.0 was named Best Desktop Operating System of 1996 by Info World.

There are many issues affecting the choice of operating systems, and the coexistence of several different operating systems is not necessarily bad. It used to be that Unix dominated the workstation market, and versions of Microsoft's operating systems dominated the PC market. At present, Unix (in the form of Linux and Solaris, etc.) is migrating downwards, and Microsoft's operating system (in the form of Windows NT) is migrating upwards. Where this will lead in the end cannot be foreseen, but the availability of choice cannot be bad for the consumer.

I hope your highly respected newspaper will not be satisfied with the uniquely one-sided coverage of Linux given by Mr. Hewson, and the issue will be revisited from a different angle.

Sincerely yours,
Attila Mate
Professor, Dept of Mathematics
City University of New York

Contact Information

To contact the MUUG board for membership information or anything else, send e-mail to board@muug.mb.ca. We have a Web presence as well, at http://www.muug.mb.ca/, where you can find all kinds of information, including details of upcoming and past meetings and presentations and references related to them. E-mail the editor at editor@muug.mb.ca.