

# LinuxWorld View, Linux worldview

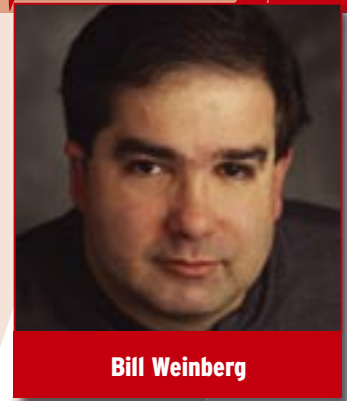
**W**hen I first began my pilgrimages to LinuxWorld Expo San Francisco, way back in the late 20th Century, the event was a geek mecca, wall-to-wall with pony tails and teeshirts and sneakers and youthful technical exuberance. Hundreds of exhibitors, large and small, welcomed thousands of attendees to see the sights, hear the pitches, sit in on the talks and BoFs and soak up the ambiance.

In the intervening years, geeks have given way to IT mavens, managers and lawyers, with a much higher "suit count". Exhibitor counts waned and waxed: smaller companies met their demise and larger concerns like AMD, IBM, Intel, Red Hat and Sun stayed the course and retargeted their messages for a corporate audience. The evangelical fervor that once dominated conference sessions and keynotes lost ground to more practical presentations on business and technology, punctuated by too-frequent sales pitches.

In short, LinuxWorld Expo and the World of Linux it reflects have grown up. LinuxWorld Expo 2005 in San Francisco in August typified

on Linux or otherwise build on or interact with open source software. Indeed, the growing ISV presence and the shrink-wrap emphasis from long-term participants reveals the essential change in tenor. What was "Open source - we can build it" is now "Open source - you can buy it". One of the more interesting ISVs to exhibit was Palo Alto-based Funambol, whose Sync4j project and value-add-ons promise to advance mobile device synchronization, provisioning and management.

This sea change should not be seen as negative - the generation of companies that replaced the first wave of open source businesses just



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this trend toward the business mainstream. Situated in the newer multi-story West Wing of SF's Moscone Center, the exhibition floor and conference sessions were spread vertically across three stories, but IDG assures me that booth space sales and attendance exceeded expectations - some 200 companies (up 20 per cent from last year) and dozens of orgs plied their wares and projects to over 11,000 thousand eager attendees, and almost 900 paying conference-goers. Highly notable and memorable were:

- Eben Moglen announcing that version 3.0 of the GPL (due out in 2007) would "shore up" and "renovate" the license, pledging that it would be less "US-centric", that it would address web services and security, but that differences from the current 2.0 would be "infinitesimal"
- Novell announcing that it would open SuSE Linux (a la FC)
- Bill Hilf of Microsoft providing a glimpse through the keyhole of Redmond's Linux Lab and averring that his role "is not to exterminate Linux" (whew!)
- Simon Crosby of XenSource presenting on virtualization and offering insight into the upcoming release of Xen 3.0 to a standing-room-only crowd
- OSDL announcing our Patent Commons
- OSDL CEO Stuart Cohen hosting a keynote panel featuring cameos by Red Hat, Novell, Eben Moglen and Chris DiBona of Google
- and of course yours truly presenting (humbly) on UNIX-to-Linux migration.

What struck me most about the exhibitors was the large number of Independent Software Vendors (ISVs) whose proprietary wares host

want to stay in business. Capitalist conversion ensures on-going vendor choice and is only hurtful to open source if and when open really is more expensive than closed. The applications and middleware buzz wasn't all proprietary - multiple sessions highlighted open alternatives like MySQL and grid and utility computing platforms.

My own session on migration was a source of both consternation and personal curiosity. Before the event, I found a site incorrectly promoting my talk as "Solaris-to-Linux Migration", causing a minor Solar flare and some singed eyebrows. During my talk I was intrigued by the great variety of migration experiences among attendees and discovered new forms of software hysteresis in real-world UNIX-to-Linux-back-to-UNIX porting tales.

On one hand, I was very pleased by the commercial emphases, the focus on enterprise applications and on virtualization, and the maturity these represent for Linux and Open Source industries. On the other hand, I really missed the passion and idealism of earlier expos. Sure, still wandering the halls and holding forth were the iconoclast Uber-geeks. These die-hard fomenters of the the movement, however, seemed out of place and time, almost naked without the cadres of adoring acolytes who once trailed after them; they looked worse for wear from crossing the chasm into the mainstream IT business.

The downside of this year's commercialism was, well, commercialism. The battle is not won; even as it becomes mainstream, Linux faces new challenges for the hearts, minds, and wallets of corporate IT. A sales pitch, however nuanced and well-spun, is still a sales pitch. Vendors take note - we all still have a market to make.

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