

LOOKING OUT MY WINDOW

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,

One of my memorable moments as a homeowner was looking out the window at a pair of neighborhood kids in my backyard, who were immersed in some sort of water fight. Never mind that my own kids weren't with them, or that they didn't have any kind of permission to be in my backyard – I'll save those topics for the child-rearing magazines. In this case, the fight itself was what I most remember.

The two kids were brothers – an older brother and a smaller, younger brother. As you might expect, the big brother had already nailed down the prime spot with the most formidable weapon (the garden hose – which he brandished with intimidating bravado). The little brother had a very different role. His focus was on dislodging the hose from the big guy's grasp or forcing the older one to abandon the spot where he could deploy the hose effectively, and to that end, he applied a variety of tools and strategies, including frontal assault with a full water bucket, flanking action with a plastic whiffle ball bat, and an assortment of other techniques. Of course, his attacks tended to be unsuccessful (he was, after all, *the little brother*), but he could keep attacking as long as he wanted – using any techniques he wanted – and my mathematical mind quickly concluded that, if he attacked long enough and applied a sufficiently broad range of strategies, something would eventually happen that would change the stakes of the encounter.

As I watched this scuffle (which was kind of like watching squirrels in the backyard, only they were on two legs), it occurred to me that, despite the obvious advantages of the older brother, an eventual upending of the order was only a matter of time. Even though the older brother was bigger and held the best ground, he gravitated to what was essentially a defensive position. The little brother could be as creative as he wanted to be. The big brother basically did the same thing every time. Anything edgy or unpredictable would put his superior position at risk.

Why am I telling you about a water fight in my back yard ten years ago? It just seems so relevant to recent events in the high tech industry. Take Microsoft, for instance – the classic older brother. They have held the dominant position for years, but now, it seems, the collective non-linearity of all the little brothers has finally succeeded in rendering that position unremarkable – and in fact, undesirable, essentially moving the fight to a whole different yard.

Microsoft's departing Chief Software Architect Ray Ozzie recently asked the company to imagine a "post-PC" world – an acknowledgement that the old business-as-usual formula of fo-

cus the company's resources on defending their once-prized technological turf was no longer a winning strategy.

As Ozzie points out, "We have grown to perceive 'computing' as being equated with specific familiar artifacts, such as the 'computer', the 'program' that's installed on the computer, and the 'files' that are stored on that computer's 'desktop'. For the majority of users, the PC is largely indistinguishable even from the browser or Internet."

Microsoft's dominance was based on its leverage over these artifacts of the desktop computer paradigm, which is no longer a hose that one can brandish with bravado. The water fight, it seems, is somewhere else-in the world of gadgets and services, so all they can do is pack up and go.



Joe Casad,
Editor in Chief

