

Memories of LinuxWorld Boston, 2005

NEW DIRECTIONS

Booths, tools, toys, conference sessions, and birds of a feather – this year's LinuxWorld provided few surprises. But a look beyond the routine revealed some emerging new perspectives on the state of Linux.

BY JOE CASAD

The Linux faithful gathered on February 7-10 for the East coast US LinuxWorld. Many worried that this year's move from New York to Boston would diminish the size or energy of the event, but most observers agreed that this year's show was as bustling as the last.

Impressions

This show *looked* like all the other recent Linux shows, but one could still get the impression that new things were happening in Linux – especially in the areas of the enterprise and the desktop, where the big vendors reached for new levels of acceptance. The shakedown of the high-tech market has made many of the more redundant tools go away. Every product at the show seemed to have a clear and recognizable purpose-- which is not how I recall the glory days – and this is probably an indication of health.

The vendors were the usual mix of hardware titans, Linux distros, security tools, admin aids, and programming products. A busy .org pavillion offered

free booth space to non-profits, including the well known, such as Debian and KDE, and the lesser known, such as Mambo and Etherboot.

Observations

The big OS and infrastructure companies competed for the hearts of showgoers with the usual blend of gimmicks, glitz, and reasonably informative technical presentations. Novell featured a mock epic cartoon told with fairytale-like grandeur about a bunch of penguins battling the “forces of FUD.” Red Hat brought in a steady stream of listeners despite fewer gimmicks, probably because of interest in Enterprise Linux 4, which was announced at the show.

The talk from Sun was on Solaris 10 and the Java Desktop. And, with the predictable unpredictability we have come to expect from this kind of event, the small but busy space between the Red Hat and Novell booths was occupied by a Donald Trump impersonator offering an executive summary of the benefits of Pogo Linux.



Figure 2: The Donald passes on some wisdom.

The conference portion of the show had tracks on security, system and application management, integration, kernel and cluster issues, emerging technologies, data clusters, client-side Linux, and the business case for Linux and open source. The business track, which is often the vaguest and least interesting option, took on new urgency with the recent emphasis on patent issues.

The client side-Linux track, another hot spot, was the starting point for many discussions of Linux as an enterprise desktop system. OSDL's Desktop Linux Working Group unveiled their Desktop Linux Capabilities document (see the Business News).

Reflections

LinuxWorld 2005 had a definite corporate focus, which may have been unsettling to some Linux purists, but when you think about it, this change happened a few years ago. Also, it is good to remember that a show like LinuxWorld isn't exactly a sample of the complete Linux community but is, as a matter of necessity, a sample of those who have the resources for tickets and booth space.

Having said that, this year's show was illuminating, provocative, and always engaging. The news from this year's conference was that the Linux world is lean and ready for some big challenges. ■



Figure 1: Boston's Hynes Convention Center was home to this year's LinuxWorld.