



TEXT SUPPORT

Carolyn Weaver is the producer and host of Tech Books, in its third season on Tech TV, Book Television, Court TV, MSNBC Canada and Rogers Television. carolyn@fineprintonline.com



In conversation with
Marcel Gagné

MOVING TO THE LINUX
BUSINESS DESKTOP

RATING: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Marcel Gagné's passion for the Linux option has resonated with readers of his previous books and his Award winning series "Cooking with Linux" found in the Linux Journal. In his latest book, *Moving to the Linux Business Desktop*, Gagné makes the case for the security, cost and reduced complexity benefits for businesses that switch to Linux.

What are the advantages of using Linux for the business desktop?

Linux provides many great benefits. The costs of running Linux are lower overall and certainly lower in the long run.

By using Linux desktops, businesses and organizations of every size can free themselves from the licensing hassles and high costs of proprietary software. With a free operating system

and free desktop productivity applications such as the OpenOffice suite (an excellent and, in many ways, superior replacement for Microsoft Office), even a small company can save thousands of dollars.

Security is important to many businesses. If one compares Linux in terms of security, how does it do?

Security is far superior to that found in the Windows alternatives. Keep in mind that viruses and spyware are costing companies billions in lost productivity and support costs. (Linux allows you to) say goodbye to your virus checker and stop worrying.

What sort of administrative costs do businesses face with Linux?

Linux systems are more stable and generally faster than the Windows equivalent. That reliability means less time and fewer people doing systems administration and support. That administration time can be reduced even further with the deployment of Linux thin clients.

Modest PC workstations and

FAST
4

Favourite author
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Favourite Web site
www.newscientist.com

A good book...
Fills me with a sense of wonder. It transports me to wonderful and exciting worlds and fills my mind with fresh new ideas

Guilty pleasure
Listening to the music of The Arrogant Worms

even older hardware can be used to serve up state-of-the-art Linux desktops without any client installation. The desktop environment for a dozen or a 100 PCs can be served up from a powerful, central server, further reducing the amount of admin work.

Why are more organizations adding Linux to their IT infrastructures?

I keep reading that Linux is reaching a kind of "tipping point" in terms of broad industry and personal adoption and

that it is accelerating public interest in the operating system.

Linux is very much in the news, but I actually think there are a lot of factors that have come together recently to help people feel better about making the move to Linux.

For years, Linux has been a better, more stable, and more secure OS than Windows, but what has really propelled it onto the desktop is the maturity of the desktop environment. A modern Linux system running KDE (a free graphical desktop program for Linux and Unix workstations) on the desktop provides a better, more flexible, more powerful and more productive environment than anything in the Windows world.

What sort of industry support has there been for Linux?

Major players such as Amazon.com and Google use Linux clusters to serve millions of customers. Linux render farms create special effects and graphics

for Hollywood blockbusters such as *Shrek*, *Star Trek Nemesis*, *The Titanic* and many others. In fact, it's hard to find a Hollywood studio doing large-scale graphics rendering that isn't using Linux. If Linux can deliver that kind of power, imagine what it could do for you.

What advantages does Linux offer in a business environment?

I've already mentioned security, stability and the potentially huge cost savings, but I think there's one more important benefit that doesn't get anywhere near enough press and that's freedom. With Linux, you can free yourself from vendor tie-in and licensing issues. If you are unhappy with your current operating system vendor and you are running Linux, there are (options).

There's Red Hat, Mandrake, SUSE, Xandros, Libranet and more. If, on the other hand, you aren't happy with Microsoft Windows, there is no other company producing Windows.

No operating system is perfect, but Linux comes close.



INSIDER

Impossible is nothing. Improbable, however . . .

COMPUTERS, AS WE NEVER CEASE TO POINT OUT when we've got nothing better to say and blank space to fill, used to be bigish affairs. The original computer, Eniac, was apparently the size of a parking lot, 14 storeys tall, cost roughly the GNP of Belize and contained more vacuum tubes than, um, some thing with a lot of vacuum tubes in it.

With all this computing power, one could, simply by painstakingly preparing a series of punch cards, receive in a short period of time another punch card confirming that 52 times 96 equals 4,986. (Since someone's bound to write in: Yes, we know. It's part of the joke.)

What Eniac certainly could not do is adjust the cushioning of the sole of a running shoe in real time to ensure a comfortable run, unless you could prepare 1,000 punch cards a second and wore very large shoes. At least as big as Shaq's.

But this is exactly what the computer in the new shoe from capital-letter-challenged adidas-Salomon AG claims to do. (Actually, the company makes the

claim on behalf of the computer, which is too busy adjusting the cushioning in a shoe to speak to the press at the moment.)

According to a report in *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's shoe newspaper of record, magnetic sensors in the adidas send about 1,000 readings a second to the shoe's microprocessor, which gives the correct answer of 4,992 before determining whether the shoe's cushioning is optimum. If not, it uses a motor and cable to adjust accordingly.

The company will only sell about 250 pairs in Canada, adding to the cachet of owning them, according to the *Globe*. They will retail for \$350 a pair. To which my spike-heeled, orthotically corrected knee boots sniff, "Pull the other one — it's got bells on it."

AND SPEAKING OF SPIKE-HEELED, ORTHOTICALLY CORRECTED KNEE BOOTS

I love leather. (Um, where exactly are we going with this? — Ed.) So I greet this news from Inclosia



Solutions, a unit of breast-implant manufacturer Dow Chemical, with breathless anticipation: The company has developed a process to create leather laptop computers.

According to News.com, the process — called Exo overmolding — allows laptop enclosures to incorporate leather, fabric and metal. Perhaps even rich, Corinthian leather.

On that Fantasy Island in the sky, Ricardo Montalban is smiling and rubbing his hands.

PSST! Got an inside scoop? Email us at insider@itbusiness.ca