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I hope the year for Linux never comes

It's only from lofty heights that empires fall

Edmundo Carmona

Toward the end of 2005 I was reading about “the year for Linux” everywhere I went. No matter where I looked, I always found articles by GNU/Linux fans (like me) that expected this year (2006) to be “the year for Linux” (once and for all). In fact, it's been quite a few years now that I've been reading that “this will be the year for Linux”. And let me tell you something: I don't want the year for Linux to come... ever! Period.

This issue mostly surrounds the desktop arena. It's already well known that GNU/Linux is powering the 500 most powerful computers in the world (http://www.top500.org/lists/2005/11/1/Operating_System_Family) (Microsoft, of course, wants to get a piece of the supercomputing pie with its HPC version—I always rejoice at the thought of 100,000 bluescreens of death popping up in an otherwise beautiful Windows-powered cluster), and Apache's web serving market share has never been jeopardized (http://news.netcraft.com/archives/web_server_survey.html) by IIS (even they have had to learn the hard way that the tightly-coupled fashion just wasn't the way). There are other places in the enterprise where Windows will be difficult to dislodge... But, even in those places, there's a battle going on.

In the four and a half years since I first used a GNU/Linux box, it has been amazing for me to see how handling Linux has gone from being such a pain to get used to (for a win-user like I was back then), to what it is today. There are

A bunch of Ubuntu CDs



distributions now that are so simple to use that all you have to do is put a Live-CD in your computer, and you have a working environment up and running in less than 5 minutes with tons of desktop applications that can even make their Windows counterparts look rough. That's a lot of progress. I still remember the faces of my Windows using co-workers at the hospital when I showed them how Knoppix could help them recover data from a virus-possessed non-starting Windows without much hassle. It was like they'd seen an oasis after having walked through Death Valley without water.

There's been a buzz about GNU/Linux for a long time now. It's been expected to change the landscape of the IT world, and people (particularly people like me) have been expecting that moment to come any day now. But after thinking it over, I can tell you that I actually don't want that moment

The Coliseum of Rome



to come at all. That's right, I *don't*. About now I can almost hear you thinking: "What's this (so called pro-Linux) wacko going on about?", "What... does he always want to be on the losing side?", or even worse, you might be thinking: "Maybe he's working for Microsoft". Ugh! That last one hurt.

It's okay... I understand if you're thinking things like that at this point. Please, let me explain myself a little better.

What do you know about Egypt? I know it's a country located in North Africa, it's hot like hell, and it's a place which attracts thousands of tourists each year who go to see the remains of what was once a great empire.

How about Rome? It's not a country in North Africa this time but a city in Italy. However, it's still very similar to Egypt: it's a place which attracts thousands of tourists each year who go to see the remains of what was once a great empire.

Now think about IBM? It's not a country or a city and okay it doesn't attract tourists. But, it is still similar to Egypt and Rome... I think you can tell what I'm getting at now, can't you?

How many times have you seen someone or something become "The Ultimate Hit", only to be fade into obscurity? Think about it:

- The New Kids on the Block
- The Spice Girls
- Napster
- IBM
- Even Netscape
- .Net and every product delivered by Microsoft. (Okay I'm being a little hopeful with this one, I admit it.)

Some of them are not exactly in ashes. A couple of examples seem to be coming back from the underworld to scare the life out of their undertakers, so to speak. Others have just changed and are still present though not in the same "package", like Napster. But it seems to be a law of nature: once you get to the top... there's nowhere else to go but down. It all makes perfect sense.

Now it seems to be the time for free software to be "The Ultimate Hit"—time for it to be carried to the top by the momentum of GNU/Linux. Everybody is willing to make cheerful statements about FOSS. Some people have even envisioned a Microsoft-maintained Linux kernel and distribution or that Microsoft will one day release all of its source code under the GPL and place it on SourceForge (I personally believe those "visions" are unlikely). Seriously now, I'm concerned that it'll become just another in the long list of sad examples of "Ultimate Hits"—that it'll get to the top only to nose-dive into obscurity, to be spoken of only in history books. The thought of it almost brings a tear to my eye.

I've been in love with GNU/Linux since I started working with it over four years ago, and I most certainly do not want to see it become another fallen empire. Perhaps it'd be better for it to remain ever the "Next Big Hit" in the IT World. I wouldn't mind that at all. Would you?

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