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MUUGlines

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This Month's Meeting Topic TBA

Alas, this month's meeting topic is unavailable as we go to press. However, we do know a few things about the meeting:

The door prize this month is a copy of SuSE Linux 5.1 (just released!).

Our meeting this month is Tuesday, the 10th of March. We meet at IBM Canada's offices in the TD Centre, at the corner of Portage and Main. We'll gather in the lobby on the main floor – please try to be there by about 7:15 PM. Steve Moffat will then take us up to the meeting room just before the meeting starts at 7:30. Don't be late, or you may not get in.

Parking is available either in the parkade behind the TD building, off Albert Street, or in the ground level lot just north of the TD building. Entrance to the lot is from Albert Street, behind the parkade. Either way, parking is a $1.25 flat rate for the evening. You purchase your ticket from a dispenser, so make sure you've got exact change – a loonie and a quarter, or 5 quarters.

Samsung Alpha?

Although its executives have gone out of their way to voice support for the company's flagship microprocessor, there are growing indications that Digital Equipment Corp. may sell its Alpha technology to Korean electronics conglomerate Samsung Electronics Co. Ltd. by the end of the year, according to analysts.

On Monday, Digital (DEC) agreed to license the Alpha architecture to Samsung. That announcement fed speculation about the Korean giant, which plans to create spin-off processors for a variety of markets.

"Samsung is controlling more Alpha technology every day," said Mike Feibus, principal analyst at semiconductor watcher Mercury Research Inc. "We wonder if Samsung will end up owning the Alpha technology."

Mark Kirstein, an industry analyst with industry researcher In-Stat, was even more direct. "Samsung will own the Alpha by the end of the year," he said. "This is the first step (towards that goal)."

The Alpha processor is Digital's fast alternative to Intel Corp.'s Pentium II, and competes with the likes of Sun Microsystems' UltraSPARC and IBM's PowerPC. The chip has found a home in high-end servers and workstations for businesses and graphics-intensive applications. Yet, despite its technical prowess, the processor has had limited success. In 1996, for example, the latest year available, only 225,000 processors were sold, according to In-Stat.

For Samsung, the Alpha could provide a key weapon against rivals like NEC Corp. and Hitachi Ltd., which own their own microprocessors.

Analysts say the acquisition of the Alpha would provide Samsung with a hedge against price fluctuations in the computer memory market.

"Samsung has always lusted after a microprocessor," explained Mercury's Feibus.

The accord with Digital allows Samsung to develop the Alpha for the low-end workstation market. Steve Kang, senior manager of Samsung's Alpha CPU group, said Samsung intends to incorporate the next-generation processor in graphics workstations for video production and 3D graphics.

Compaq the next Intel?

In the aftermath of Compaq Computer Corp.'s announcement of plans last month to acquire Digital, many customers were relieved to learn that the Maynard, Mass. company's flagship processor — the Alpha — had finally found a way to survive. The $9.6 billion deal announced in early January will make Digital a wholly owned subsidiary of Compaq.

Yet, analysts believe Compaq will not want to compete with its primary supplier of PC processors — Intel.

"They want options — like AMD and Cyrix," explained In-Stat's Kirstein, "not a competition in new markets."

Both Digital and Compaq have already announced their intent to support Intel's next-generation processor for workstations and servers — the IA-64, also dubbed "Merced," which is expected to become available late next year. With Merced in the works, analysts said that sinking more development dollars into Alpha may not make sense.

Still, the Houston, Texas company would not become a microprocessor manufacturer, according to Nathan Brookwood, an analyst with market researcher Dataquest. He added that Compaq would not be making Alpha processors.

Under the agreement with Intel, which is still waiting government approval, Compaq/Digital would sell Digital's manufacturing facilities to Intel. The company would then purchase microprocessors from Intel or Alpha licensees, like

Samsung and Mitsubishi Co. Ltd.

Moreover, Compaq needs the Alpha, maintains Brookwood.

"Considering that Digital has several billions of dollars of computer systems business invested in the Alpha, handing that over to another company is not in their interest," he said. "Compaq sees the Alpha business as a way to get into the high-end applications that they can't reach with x86 product."

Financial analyst Lou Mazzucchelli with investment firm Gerard Klauer Mattison & Co. Inc. agrees. "Compaq wants it all," he said. "They will be cautious and keep Alpha — at least for awhile — to cover their bets."

Korea's the hitch

The perilous state of the Korean economy presents Samsung with another potential obstacle.

Faced with a possible $153 billion in foreign debt, the Korean economy in not exactly ready for growth. Jon Chong Hwa, an economist with KEB Smith Barney Securities Co. in Seoul, predicts Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd. to post only $11.4 million in profits on about $12 billion in revenues in 1997, according to the Asian Wall Street Journal.

In addition, 16MB DRAM chips - the primary business for the Korean manufacturer — fell to $7 in 1997 from $17 in 1996.

With so little ready income, even if Compaq/Digital and Samsung were talking, Samsung may not have the money to stay in the game. "Korea's the barrier to any deal," said In-Stat's Kirstein.

Still, neither Digital nor Samsung have hinted at talks beyond the Monday's design license. Digital continues to push its processor. "We certainly have plans to continue Alpha," said Marianne Mills, spokesperson for Digital's Semiconductor division. "For users who need the power of Alpha, we will be there to provide it."

A Compaq spokesman said the company was in a blackout period required by the Securities & Exchange Commission that prevented officials from commenting.

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Caldera Announces Small Business Appliance for NetWare

Pre-configured Software/ Hardware Solution Provides Plug-and-Play Server for Small and Medium Businesses

Orem, UT—Feb. 23, 1997—Caldera® Inc. today announced the Caldera Small Business Appliance™ for NetWare®, a pre-configured software/hardware solution that provides a complete network and Internet server environment for small to medium-sized businesses. This bundled, turnkey system includes NetWare® NDS®, file and print services, Web services and 56kb modem connectivity to ISPs and to the Internet.

"Caldera's new small business appliance provides services that a small business needs," said Bryan Sparks, President and CEO of Caldera, Inc. "With this product, we are directly focused at small businesses and the resellers that serve them. This appliance with NetWare NDS, file and print, and Internet connectivity brings a strong NetWare solution back to small business customers."

This combined software/hardware appliance provides small to medium businesses with more functionality, fewer installation/administration requirements and a lower cost than software-only solutions such as the Microsoft® Small Business Server. The Caldera Small Business Appliance for NetWare includes:

NetWare NDS, file and print services
Built-in TCP/IP router and IPX— Internet and LAN Ready
Integrated Secure Web Server for Internet/Intranet connectivity
Client connectivity for DOS, Windows®, Windows 95/NT®, OS/2®, UNIX® and Macintosh®
Pre-configured Internet E-mail / Web server
Ability to run client/server applications

The Caldera Small Business Appliance for NetWare includes high Internet security and encryption capability for the U.S. and Canadian markets. The OpenLinux®-based software backbone of this appliance provides broad scalability from the smallest of businesses to high-powered network systems. The hardware components include space for expansion components such as tape backup, disk subsystems and high-speed Internet connectivity adapters.

The Caldera Small Business Appliance for NetWare, with a 25-user license, will sell for less than $4,000. Caldera plans to begin shipping the product during Q2 1998.

Contact Caldera at (888) 465-4689 in the United States, +44 (0) 1264 333600 in Europe, or (801) 765-4999 outside of the United States and Europe. Send E-mail to "info@caldera.com"and visit Caldera's Web site at www.caldera.com.

InfoWorld Awards RedHat Linux 5 NOS Product of the Year

by Eric Hammond

Unix was at the core of early Internet development, and it remains there today. Free Unix provides a powerful, inexpensive tool for harnessing the power of the Internet. The major free Unix product, Linux enjoys widespread popularity among those seeking an Intel-based Unix solution. The fact that this product is also available for Sparc, Alpha, and PowerPC architectures only adds to its popularity.

Red Hat Linux 5.0's low price, full feature set, and solid performance combined to make it a Product of the Year in any category. Like other Linux implementations, there is a free version of Red Hat Linux as well as a commercial version. The free version, available on the Web, will get you running a basic Unix server in no time.

The commercial version ships on a CD-ROM with printed documentation, access to installation support, and several software packages.

For $49.95, the operating system includes everything you need to set up any number of Unix host configurations, an intranet platform, a Web server, a development box, or a multimedia desktop. The possibilities are further enhanced by the plethora of free and commercial software available for Linux.

Red Hat recognized commercial organizations' need for reliable support, and so the company now provides several help options including telephone support.

There isn't any reason why Linux can't be implemented as an enterprise computing solution. Find out what you've been missing while you've been rebooting Windows NT.

InfoWorld Awards Product of the Year to Linux Community

We've had some big names win the Product of the Year Award for Best Technical Support, and we've had some not-so-big names triumph as well. But this year marks the first time we're going to have to figure out just what our winner's name is.

When I asked readers in December for their feedback on who should get this award, I already anticipated the general discontent over product support that seems to exist. What I didn't expect, though, was that I'd wind up getting almost as many votes recommending that the award be given to users as I received votes for specific vendors.

Many readers echoed the sentiments of one who argued that "your award should really go to all the people out there on Usenet and IRC [Internet Relay Chat who] take the time to answer questions, no matter how dumb or how tough it might be. The Internet itself is the best support organization around now."

And the one group of users who were by far most often cited as providing the help needed were the users of Linux and other "free" versions of Unix. So the winner we're naming for Best Technical Support this year is the Linux user community.

As something you can download for free, of course, Linux doesn't necessarily come with the support of a commercial entity, but that's exactly why many readers said they like it.

"The online support via Usenet, Web pages, and IRC is far better than anything that you can get from a commercial vendor, as far as resolving real-world problems," wrote one InfoWorld Electric forum participant, who offered the analogy of a Microsoft Access customer calling Microsoft on a hard-to-solve problem. "So imagine, if you will, that the Microsoft staffer on the line directs you to a Web page where you can download free of charge the latest release of SQL Server and a free copy of C++ in order to solve your problem, and then follows this up a week later by e-mailing you a program that was written in his/her spare time that extends your program in some new way ... 'Impossible! [It will] never happen!' you say ... [but] this sort of thing literally happens hundreds of times, every day of the week, all year long."

Defying logic

But can free support from other users really be relied upon as much as support that you've paid for? Many Linux users insist that it can.

"While it seems to defy logic, it coincides with my experience," another reader wrote. "With most commercial software, you pay and still don't get any support. Many times [the vendors] deny that there are bugs in their software. If I have problems with a widely used freeware program, there is somebody or other on Usenet who knows the answers. Even better, a search may tell you that your question has already been posed and answered. On the other hand, if I am using free software that is not widely used, the author is usually not swamped with questions and hence [is] always willing to answer questions about his or her baby."

When users of commercial software have a problem, they have a limited number of increasingly expensive resources offered by the vendor to get the answers they need. Linux users said they have a virtually infinite array of

free resources such as posting a question on various forums, doing a search of the innumerable Web pages with posted fixes, e-mailing the program developer directly, or looking at the source code and figuring out a fix of their own.

Although this support paradigm is obviously one that appeals to the programmer types who were early Linux adopters, corporate users havebeen slow to adopt freeware products, in large part, because of concerns about support. But several readers who are using Linux in a business environment said they found the support they received to be far more impressive than what they were used to with commercial software.

"Technical support from the commercial vendors is uneven technically and may be unavailable unless subscribing to a 'premium' service," said a system administrator who works with both Linux workstations and commercial systems. "Tech support for Linux is available anytime, anyplace I can get access to the Net. Those that go the free Unix route feel that it's our thing, [and] this translates into a willingness to put extra effort into learning the details and sharing them with our friends."

Having access to the source code and the programmer as well can be a big advantage when a business finds itself in one of those finger-pointing situations.

A reader who moved his shop from supported Unix to using Linux exclusively gave the example of when a BIOS defect in some of his company's systems were conflicting with their Ethernet cards. After the dealer, PC vendor, NetWare card vendor, and motherboard manufacturer had all failed to help, he contacted the author of the Linux driver for the Ethernet cards.

"The driver author within days rewrote the driver to accommodate the defect in the BIOS, as he had heard from three people about this!" the reader wrote. "Now, imagine any other company making a `work-around' on its software product that is due to a defect in hardware not in its control that only affects three customers!"

Still hope for commercial products

For those who aren't ready to swear off commercial products yet, there is still hope. In fact, trackball manufacturer Kensington Microware deserves an honorable mention for receiving as many nominations as some of the big guys.

It would be nice to think that in 1998 the vendors will stage a comeback and take this award back from the users. I don't know if I'll be holding mybreath, though. With so many vendors clearly looking on support just as a cost to be defrayed, users of IT products can expect to look elsewhere for the answers they need to complex problems.

And they are likely to find that the most valuable support resource they have is each other.

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Get VNC

VNC stands for Virtual Network Computing. It is, in essence, a remote display system which allows you to view a computing 'desktop' environment not only on the machine where it is running, but from anywhere on the Internet and from a wide variety of machine architectures.

The VNC system allows you to access the same desktop from a wide variety of platforms. Many of us at ORL, for example, use a VNC viewer running on a PC on our desks to display our Unix environments which are running on a large server in the machine room downstairs.

What makes it different from other systems? For this simple mode of operation, you could achieve a similar effect by installing an X server on your PC. The important factors which distinguish VNC from other remote display systems such as X are as follows:

No state is stored at the viewer. This means you can leave your desk, go to another machine, whether next door or several hundred miles away, reconnect to your desktop from there and finish the sentence you were typing. Even the cursor will be in the same place.

It is small and simple. The Win32 viewer, for example, is about 150K in size and can be run directly from a floppy. There is no installation needed.

It is truly platform-independent. A desktop running on a Linux machine may be displayed on a PC. Or a Solaris machine. We have a Java viewer, which will run in any Java-capable browser. We have a Windows NT server, allowing you to view the desktop of a remote NT machine on any of these platforms using exactly the same viewer.

It is sharable. One desktop can be displayed and used by several viewers at once, allowing CSCW-style applications.

It is free, under the GNU license!Get it from http://www.orl.co.uk/vnc/.

Contact Information

To contact the MUUG board for membership information or anything else, send e-mail to board@muug.mb.ca. We have a Web presence as well, at http://www.muug.mb.ca/, where you can find all kinds of information, including details of upcoming and past meetings and presentations and references related to them. E-mail the editor at editor@muug.mb.ca.