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Community Debates M$'s Open-Source Agenda

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Analysts and insiders-including Linus Torvalds-say they think that Microsoft's move to start a dialogue with the open-source community shows that the company is recognizing that open source has real, lasting value.

After a series of friendly moves towards open-source developers, Microsoft Corp. has talked with Michael Tiemann, president of the Open Source Initiative and vice president of open-source affairs at Linux vendor Red Hat Inc., about meeting with him to "begin a productive conversation" between proponents of open source and Microsoft.

What could Microsoft have to talk about with the open-source community?

Well, for one thing, Microsoft might be trying to cool off the high emotions flying between fans of open source and of Microsoft.

"It appears that Microsoft is attempting to change the environment from its currently highly charged, highly emotional state to something more constructive," said Dan Kusnetzky, IDC's system software vice president.

Linus Torvalds, primary creator of Linux, said he would welcome such a change.

"Hey, I'm all for being friendly," Torvalds said. "To me, Microsoft has never been the competition, and it's never been a Linux vs. Microsoft thing, despite that obviously having been how a lot of people end up slanting it."

Microsoft may also have developers within it that truly want to contribute to open source.

"Non-constructive executive rhetoric aside, there are substantial bodies of people within Microsoft that either already have or are ready to make good faith contributions to the open-source world," said Stephen O'Grady, a software analyst for RedMonk.

Tiemann of Red Hat even went so far as to suggest that the Microsoft Shared Source program represents "an attempt to quell an internal civil war" at Microsoft.

George Weiss, a Gartner Inc. vice president and distinguished analyst, said he doesn't buy this theory: "The people I know at Microsoft feel like they're part of an elite and they're proud of their work. Yes, some of them have interest in open source, but I don't see an internal divide with two camps warring with each other in Microsoft."

Instead, Weiss said he believes that Microsoft is trying diplomacy with the open-source community because the Redmond, Calif.-headquartered company has "recognized that they have to play in an eclectic world, which includes open source."

Now, this "doesn't change Microsoft's basic business premise or its position on intellectual property or its business model, but they realize that they have to play with the open-source world to be successful," Weiss said.

Yankee Group Research Inc. analyst Laura DiDio agrees.

Rest of the Story [2].

Microsoft

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