

Ubuntu Linux backer tackles collaboration

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Mark Shuttleworth, the chief executive officer of Canonical, the company sponsoring much Ubuntu development, told ZDNet Australia he hopes to create tools that make it possible for Linux developers to quickly integrate the work of their peers worldwide, irrespective of the distribution or packages they work on.

The aim of the project -- called The Launchpad -- is to make it easier for Linux developers to find the latest enhancements to the operating system and its myriad packages, no matter which distribution they were contributed to. The effort encompasses distributed bug tracking, revision control, language translations and more.

The tools Canonical plans will be able to tap into source code created for any distribution or open source project, then integrate that work to take advantage of efforts across the globe, the better to advance the entire open source platform.

Shuttleworth, who sold his company Thawte to RSA in 1999 in a transaction valued at \$US575million, believes Ubuntu will be one of the main beneficiaries.

"I am fortunate in that I do not have to worry about short term risks," he says. "I am trying to look a little further down the pipeline than most companies can and I would rather be at the centre of the tightening web than on the fringes. Even though I am well resourced we are a drop in the ocean in the OS world. As the framework [for using code from across the community] sets, hopefully we are at the centre of it. Further down the pipeline we may need to differentiate on other grounds".

That future differentiation may come from continuing Ubuntu's evolution as a distribution that delivers an excellent desktop experience. Much of the work at last week's Ubuntu Down Under conference in Sydney focussed on enhancements to improve common desktop services such as multimedia. Thin client implementations were another focus, as a way to make Ubuntu the distribution of choice for educators and enterprises alike.

Yet while Shuttleworth is ambitious for Ubuntu -- which shipped 1 million CDs of its most recent release -- he believes staying true to the open source ethos is an essential ingredient for success.

"The most important thing for us to recognise is that people will only get the desktop operating system from someone they trust," he says. "So you have to be very careful about maintaining that level of trust.

"The future is what you do with the software, not what you paid for the software, and I think we can build a great business because by providing the desktop you become the default for anything users want to do on the machine".

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