

Selling the dream

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You try and do somebody a favour and they look at you like you've just sprouted three heads, 6 arms and a goatee (on the middle mush). What am I talking about? Well, let me fill you in. I've been doing some freelancing work for a local company, a part management tracking system. Yesterday I had a chat with the director and offered to cut his costs on licensing. 120 or so users, mainly the usual office stuff, excel, word, mail, internet, solitaire... the bog standard, out the box, default install. Development of the bespoke software is all C# based, I know that coz I did it (Hey, gotta pay the bills, free speech and beer aside, the vultures fly over the bank account).

"How?" he asked, eyes widening, foaming at the mouth contemplating the money in the bank (until the point of saving money was mentioned his mobile phone had been glued to his ear, now it was off (phone, not ear)... I had his attention... and in for the kill!)

"With Linux", says I. At that point a sort of quizzical look materialised over his face, screwing up into what looked like yoda with constipation and then silence with a long, confused, eyebrow raised stare. I thought I might have said it in Russian so I said it again, "Linux". He stayed silent, still in that confused state... after a while I thought it was me, sniffed under my arms, deodorant working, nothing sneaked out round the back, checked the zip, nothing hanging out of my... well you get the idea. Now you may think that he had never heard of Linux, hence the look but he has, he's a meddler and fiddler of computers (keeps me in beer money so I don't complain) with some education (albeit Microsoft based) but has read and he has seen so he does know there's an operating system with more varieties than Heinz and it's called Linux. And Linux? Well that's like Unix (user view here). Do you know what he'd heard? The same as every other MS induced person... "Oh, it's fiddly, can't be good if it's free, too complicated, users won't know what to do, it's for computer engineers with PhD's and leather arm patches, sporting long grey hair in a pony tails, goatee beards... too many different ones, none are stable, always being messed with?" Isn't marketing great? 3 months ago I had a view not too dissimilar, how quickly a little knowledge changes that.

I know, from sitting in those offices and working, observing, that he'd save a good wad by letting me run rampant and sort it out. Yes, I am new to Linux but I learn quickly, I can read and there are a plethora (word of the day!) of forums and help sites around to guide my installing wand. Ok, I would charge for support and if he wasn't happy with me he could always pay Novell, Linspire, Xandros or Conkers (Canonical). It would still be less than his license fees on the MS platform. Doing a quick guestimate, he's just received a bill hitting around the 50k GBP mark, probably for BG's leaving collection. Actually it's for SQL server, Visual Studio licensing, XP upgrade, office pro upgrade etc. That's a sizeable wedge for any company. Even with a 20-30% saving (guestimated again) it makes a noticable difference, but it was the marketing equivalent of a Sinclair C5. He just wouldn't buy into it. His view, like many others, is tainted by ignorance. I suppose that marketing this kind of thing is always going to be difficult as it is community based not profit, enterprise or business (changing I know), but I do think that Novell, Ubuntu and others of the ilk, are going down the right roads. Maybe it is about image, you do need to be the one to stand out, to be talked about, to be in the news, to be in the magazines and with Shuttleworth's bank account behind it (the few 0's he didn't give to the Russkies), he could just break into that market. From the start of MS people heard the name of Big Bill, the butt of many jokes and jibes, but he was a character salesman, made some shrewd moves and got his products accepted where others failed (PC Dos,

Dr Dos, OS/2, Warp) and you know what? If Shuttleworth does the same he'll get Linux on the desktops en masse, and by that time it'll be all over other platforms too.

So, back to the original point, it took a long conversation, many demos of Kubuntu (it's still on the laptop, week 4 now! Whey!) and many beers to let me in with a proposed demo to pitch against his MS setup. A mini network, a couple of users from each team, typists, accounts, orders, processing etc. If it works he'll take it on, if not, then nothing has been lost but my time and a stupid bet involving being Naked, Guinness, vindaloo, traffic cone and a stop watch. So now I have to design the topology, work out how the hell I'm going to do what my motor mouth said I could do... somebody please cut out my tongue before I talk myself into more of this stuff! Just like on holiday, Motorbikes? Yes I can do motorbikes... 2 hours later and I was in 55 degrees, desert, sand, scorching wind searing flesh from bone, and a bike that shook more than a force 9 in L.A, I'm sure I have miners finger? it was the most uncomfortable 4 hours of my life... any ideas (easier the better) to make this demo work would be gratefully received...

Did I mention I was on holiday? No? Well I was, and for the most part it was good. Egypt is just fine when you have the stop and go (the tablets to stop you from going and the tablets to get you going)... got some diving in too, although that cost more than I expected as my fairer half wanted to make full use of the Spa adjoined to the hotel in exchange for letting me go underwater for a day! Spa's aren't cheap... and there's a story of an Adam and eve massage, looking like a sumo wrestler... saved for another time!

Back to point, after trawling through some sites, I noticed people try to market/sell the idea of Linux based on windows equivalent, this Linux app = this win app, I'm not sure that's the right idea, wouldn't it be better to show the user what you have, drop the Linux pants and wave the private parts at it's aunties! Show Open Office, let the demoe decide what it resembles, answer the questions, can it...? will it...? does it...? has it...? all can be answered positively as there isn't much in the office environment that Linux won't handle (from what I have seen through my limited goggles), no matter what flavour it is, and for more bespoke applications? Well that would need a little more think time to show off. I'm confident I'll get it in, whatever make or model but this first one is a big learning curve for me and I just hope I don't cut the wrong wire, pull the wrong lever and blow up the office or sink the ship. Titanic anyone? King of the world...!

Oh, and in other news, a large(ish) pie and bakers in the UK has just taken on a linux based platform:

<http://www.computing.co.uk/computing/news/2155944/greggs-complete-epos-rollout>

I for one will be keeping a close eye on these few and far between enterprise roll outs.

Speaking of pies feeling a bit peckish myself...time for a wigan kebab?

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