Why Microsoft Still Rules the Desktop Market?

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"Our new products are always better than the old one's ... more innovative, more user friendly, more faster and blah blah blah blah." Around 90% of the world's population using computers have already read this sentence hundred times. The blatant fact is, Microsoft products dictate the consumer PC market. Linus Torvalds unique obsession is more than a decade old, hundred times better, thousand times safer and a zillion times cheaper ... yet you won't find it on every Tom, Dick and Harry's computer. Why? Maybe because we don't have the marketing brains similar to Mr. Gates. And who is to blame for all this? I, Me and Myself ... and maybe some big wigs and may be some big shots but not in any case the Redmond Giant ...

As I go further criticising people and company's in their approach towards Linux inviting more foe's and risking an article with massive harsh comments, but it's a risk worth venturing into.

It has been more than a decade since Linux first made it's debut and only seven years for Microsoft Windows 95. And Windows dominance is not restricted to the desktop, it costs you money to buy the product and the remaining things such as 58744 viruses, the prestige of being "most hacked operating system", the fact that if world's richest man pays $10 / system crash — he shall be bankrupt in a span of three years come along with the package for free. On other hand GNU/Linux is much stable, has just around dozen viruses, fewer enemies as compared to Windows and you don't shell out money to use it. But still the general mindset is inclined towards usage of Microsoft's products ...

Recently, Dell and a few other companies started shipping desktops with GNU/Linux as the OS. They expected to reap some monetary gains out of this and finally when results didn't come out, they simply stopped it with explanations like : Support for GNU/Linux is expensive and the turnover simply doesn't justify the step, Linux market is not as catchy as windows (I believe they had some ratio of 1000 Windows : 50 GNU/Linux PC's). Now if any sensible person scrutinizes this situation carefully, it should go like this: Linux is nothing new as compared to Windows. It has a similar GUI, similar look that goes with the belief "GNU/Linux is for Geeks and Windows is for everyone."

This belief has been embedded into the minds of people since a long long time and little is being done to change it. Companies shouldn't look into Linux as a money making machine. It's a process, an evolution, something that shall take time maybe 5 years or more ... but it will happen, no matter what. A 5% turnover ratio is not justifiable. MS products have a 90% share and given

the large volumes, for that share to come down to 85% will take a considerable amount of time. And the annual sales graph is not something to be discussed at the time of Quarterly Sales result. Give it time to settle and don't expect results to make you rich the way MS products do. Accept the fact that the graph shall be an exponential one with a very very long rise time.

The companies offer explanation as "Support being too costly to handle" is more of a jocular thing. Less than two years ago, we had Talkcity, a company that used to hire people as TC-C's who used to chat for hours and hours together with the punch line "I love to chat and help people." And did anyone ever visit #linuxhelp on *irc.openprojects.net*? There are people doing this stuff already free of cost. If some company pay's out these people $10/hour, won't the resume's flood their inboxes? Company shall save out the "teaching" costs, shall have help ready at hand at any time of day. Only expense is to teach some of the techies some chat etiquette as some of them are too short tempered when it comes to repeat one thing over and over again :P .

Big wigs such as IBM support GNU/Linux immensely. All this keeps up the motivation spirit soaring high. But when it comes to shipping product's with Linux they simply turn their backs on. People shall argue that IBM supports GNU/Linux much better than any companies do. Agreed, but that's the case in US. I have terrible problem, still unsolved, for my IBM Thinkpad I 1300 series. Mainly because support for GNU/Linux in India is seemingly pathetic.

Hewlett Packard has it's own HP-UX clone of Unix, drivers for it's printers freely exist, their own office uses HP-UX systems for managing systems/peripherals that come in for repairs, but try asking them for Unix support.

Recently we had the DOT-COM rule. The idea certainly was chimerical. Had even one venture capitalist tried out advocating GNU/Linux with the same dot-com spirit , they had pretty high chances increasing their cash flows rather than by the concept of "give free things now and hopefully make money later." No one realised this, or were too skeptical of GNU/Linux helping to increase their bank account.

Windows XP is all set to launch by October end with Microsoft spending more than $5 million in advertising and publicising. How many GNU/Linux companies, RedHat, SuSe, Mandrake have spent even half the amount marketing out it's newest product? If it makes sense for one company to market a product and become rich but then why doesn't it make sense for some other company to atleast come close enough to making money by spending some money. In China, MS is using some ferries with huge hoardings for marketing XP, in India there are groups of people standing besides the "road" endorsing "The new experience", newspapers carry full page advertisements, TV ad's try to explain things which hardly relates to MS products but has any GNU/Linux version atleast given out "free good quality caps" to public? If you don't advertise for the mass market, how do you pulicise your product? Ain't these the basics of Marketing . . .

Prior to web, our only source of information was newspapers and magazines. Atleast in India there are more than a dozen computer based magazines but how many of them actually write things other than Windows? Only one — PCQuest. It's not entirely devoted to GNU/Linux, but still covers it comprehensively. Current competition for Windows based magazines is cut throat but no one has ever thought of a complete GNU/Linux devoted magazine. Skeptics argue on fact "Market is not ready". Isn't there a saying like "There's always first time." When I approached a few publica-

tions for writing stuff dedicated to GNU/Linux, some of them didn't reply, other's said they shall contact me soon ... and this was in March 2001. Some time back, OpenMagazine had sent out a few copies to me which were really impressive. However shipping charges and subscription costs were prime factors refraining me from subscribing. Though PCQuest has received an excellent support, there are unknown reasons as to why they don't start a full fledged magazine advocating GNU/Linux.

In my college where we learn "C Programming" and which boasts of around 100 computers, hardly any lab has Unix, GNU/Linux installed. Each PC uses NT, paying MS a fair amount of money for dubious reasons. If we college students are not exposed to atleast compiling C programs on Unix, why blame others?

Today the market is different than it was 3-4 years ago. People know what computers are, what's Windows and what's Linux. My next door neighbour reads about GNU/Linux in his own vernacular "Marathi" language and is damn interested in having a look at "GNU/Linux." My brother who happens to be a doctor, once saw me surfing the net on GNU/Linux, tried it and now loves it. He feels that Internet Explorer and Konqueror are similar. But now argues with his colleagues "Get a life man ... We are using Windows since 1995, we even don't buy same brand clothes everytime (unless adidas offers it for free) so why stick to one software company. Unarguably, he is dead right.

Cehat — A charity organization uses Windows to surf the net, send emails and use Word for writing articles/memos. And they continuously face virus attacks. When a person approached me, he was actually surprised when I told him you don't need to have an "Anti-Virus scanner for GNU/Linux." Inquisitely, he tried his hand at

GNU/Linux, got hooked to it for more than 2 straight hours and is now coaxing his boss to shift towards GNU/Linux.

People should accept facts that piracy exists all around the world and prevention is a horrendous task. So, if a person loads Windows 98 he doesn't get anything except a "gold cd-r with product key written on it." No accompanying documentation. When my former FreeOS.com employer gave me Corel Office 2000 for reviewing I was impressed with the accompanying documentation. It was on par with Office 2000, was on good quality paper, everything was explained and put up properly and graphics were visually impressive. So next time when a person tries his/her hand at buying some pirated product, get's impressed by the documentation accompanying GNU/Linux products won't he get hooked to it?

Install Windows and you just have a single Operating System with age- old games such as Solitaire, hearts and what not ... you don't get any Download Accelerator, no good photo editing tool, not even a good IRC chat client and absolutely nothing to view your `.pdf` files. Install GNU/Linux and you shall have all ingredients to spice up your life. There's Gimp the slyly fox, xpdf for `.pdf` files, xchat — the mIRC counterpart and the list goes on and on and on ... In India, only 30000 are exposed to high speed internet access. Given the size of bare essentials executables (ICQ = 5mb for example) needed for proper surfing, LICQ is barely 300kb. So using GNU/Linux one not only saves initial investment but goes further in reducing running costs.

As Macintosh becomes bit popular, thanks to it's different look, some cyber-cafes are using iMac's for surfing to boost up sales. Someone seem's to have forgotten GNU/Linux ... It's new, it's different, it's wonderful and that's what is required to make something run. Though I am sure that

once the trend is set, we shall have cybercafes on similar grounds, the question that remains unanswered is "Who shall bell the cat?"

During my Dad's recent trip to Africa, he observed most PC's are 80386 and having a Pentium 100 MHz is something like owning a Mercedes Benz. If that's the case, then isn't the African market conducible for GNU/Linux to usher? GNU/Linux runs on 80386, and considering the economy of Africa it's available free of cost, dominance of Windows 98 or even Windows 95 is fairly slim. Only thing that remains to be done, send some GNU/Linux advocates to Africa and see the sales chart grow.

Phew! Bundling up all, for eyes that missed up some of the above statements here's the conclusion: GNU/Linux is not for geeks. People thought GNU/Linux was for geeks but then something hampered their ego and self esteem and now are sure that GNU/Linux can be used by everyone. GNU/Linux has all what it takes to flourish and rule the desktop but it requires time. Currently real threat to MS dominance comes from GNU/Linux in the server area and not desktop ... and when MS feels real threat from GNU/Linux in the Desktop — maybe we shall see Microsoft GNU/Linux 1.0 :)

About the Author Anurag Phadke, is 21 years old. He is an Electronics Engineering Student in Shah and Anchor Kutchhi Enginnering College (affilated to Mumbai University). He is a freelance writer since last two years, he simply loves to write about technology. A prime advocate of GNU/Linux and an infamous hacker, Anurag now-a-days spends most of his time admiring DSL connection on his Penguin powered IBM i-1300 series laptop. He dreams that someday he shall own all the gizmo products listed @ *http://www.thinkgeek.com.* Until then, he is quite

content with his zero billion dollar company — Brainless Inc.

Red Hat's Market Strategy

Feb 04, 2002, Bob Young, the CEO of Red Hat, said Red Hat's market strategy is to replace legacy Un*x systems, and expanding its presence in the embedded market.

"The real problem for the enterprise, though, is that enterprise buyers are not buying tools for today. The job of the Information Services director is not to buy the best solution for the company today; it is to buy the solution that will give the company a five-year return on investment, because he knows he's going to be using that technology for the next five years. If he buys technology from a company that isn't around six months from now, it isn't just his resume that gets hurt, the corporation he's responsible for building gets hurt."

Bob Young said GNU/Linux will never replace Windows on the desktop — "If you've got a perfectly good working PC, why you would go through the angst of replacing it?"

Red Hat GNU/Linux is now an 800MB operating system, consists of 763 different packages including the 16MB Linux kernel, all are built by a huge number of different engineering teams across the Internet.

"What makes GNU/Linux the future? ... In the big picture, it's the collaborative development model." said Bob Young.

This news is digested and edited from ZDNet News, of Matthew Broersma's interview with Bob Young, originally published at *http://dailynews.yahoo.com* —FSM