



# Take cover - Linux is coming!

by Mark Lillycrop

Love it or hate it, one thing you can't do with Linux is ignore it. The Open Source operating system has stolen more than its fair share of headlines in recent months, and has won the affection of a growing number of IT managers who were growing disenchanted with the status quo.

Politically, the big appeal of Linux comes down to its vendor-neutrality (well, OK, it's not exactly vendor-neutral, but it is based on clearly defined standards that don't belong to any one supplier) and the ease with which Linux apps can be ported from one platform to another. This latter benefit puts the user back in the driving seat, and - potentially - gives him more power to choose the appropriate technology and reduce costs. This means that Open Source is gaining support not just among the technicians who enjoy the community spirit of the product's development and support, but also among the business leaders who see it as a golden opportunity to resist vendor lock-in and save money.

So far, so good. But for all its popularity, Linux has yet to be accepted wholeheartedly by the enterprise community. For many in the corporate world, the system has yet to reach the level of maturity needed for running bet-your-business applications. What many of these organizations are waiting for, I suspect, are practical examples of Linux being used in anger to tackle very large secure, transactional workloads.

Well, examples are beginning to emerge – and don't blink now or you might miss Linux' official entry into the mission-critical world. The product is finally being taken



## Arcati Research

seriously in the data center, driven not just by economy-minded users but by a number of very powerful vendors who see Linux as one of the few real growth prospects in enterprise IT. Companies like IBM and HP are putting a big investment into Linux (in IBM's case, the operating system really provides portability between hardware platforms for the first time), and are giving it the robustness and manageability traits it needs to survive in the large enterprise.

Just recently, Amazon.com has been explaining how it managed to save \$17 million on its IT budget with an ambitious move to Linux from a complex configuration of Unix systems. The migration was far from simple (redeveloping 64-bit Unix apps for 32-bit Linux is not an exercise for the faint-hearted!), and for Linux specialist Red Hat, supporting the move to Open Source on its Advanced Server, Amazon was really blazing a new trail. But with the help of stalwarts like data center heavyweight BMC, whose PATROL product is being used to manage the new set-up, Amazon has been very pleased with the level of performance its new systems are delivering.

It has to be said that, despite its vast throughput of transactions, Amazon.com has a less complex infrastructure than many large organizations. Dot-coms, even the big ones, do not have to cope with the diversity of legacy applications that many AFKOM members are running. For more mature enterprises, a move to something as radically different as Linux poses very considerable challenges.

But it is happening. Over here in Europe, a number of national governments - huge consumers of 'traditional' IT - are taking to Open Source in a big way. France and Finland are following the Linux route. And, in June, the German Federal Ministry of the Interior



## Arcati Research

announced a far-reaching agreement with IBM which will see Linux being rolled out across the board.

The Federal Ministry IT management are going for Linux not just to save money but to achieve better interoperability and security. Lack of integration is a big problem across the European public sector, and there is a growing feeling that some proprietary technology, particularly in the PC world, is leaving systems too vulnerable to attack. Although Open Source cannot eradicate these problems, it does give users more control over their choice of standards and the way they implement them.

So even if you don't think a move to Open Source is right for your organization, it's worth taking a look at the results achieved by some of those who have taken the jump. And beware - if you deal with government departments, particularly in Europe, you may find yourself under pressure to move in that direction sooner than you think!

*Mark Lillycrop is Chief Analyst of Arcati Ltd.*