



Vigilant Articles

LINUX PUSHES INTO RETAIL

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by Jennifer Wilck, Contributing Editor

Linux is growing slowly but steadily for retail applications. Among dealers of Vigilant Business Software, Toronto, the company reports that the platform may attract up to 20 percent of its Microsoft Windows dealers over the next year.

"The end-user is now ready to consider alternatives, so VARs can now recommend this operating environment," says Jane Giggall, Vice President, Strategic Planning.

The increasing use of the Internet for business is also helping push Linux, adds Giggall. "From all reports, Linux has dozens of application that are suitable for the Internet," she says.

One strong suit of Linux is multi-site polling. "Linux is particularly stable when moving data between stores in a chain," says Jon Mainwaring, Vigilant's President. "A store taking inventory and bringing it into corporate, then sending it out stores so they have that inventory information requires a very stable environment. Combine that need with the fact that most trading information procedures happen unattended in the middle of the night."

One Vigilant client, Kenwood Factory Outlet, is using Linux and Vigilant's Multi-Site Polling Software. The Linux-based server handles network traffic and file management on the operations side, while Vigilant software handles point-of-sale, inventory control and back-office activities. The store has several workstations in the showroom area to process sales. A computer in the office handles administrative functions, such as purchasing and financial analysis. Based in Long Beach, CA, Kenwood has stores in Santa Fe Springs, GA and Farmers Branch, TX.

"Each multiple factory outlet is run autonomously. They needed all information pulled back to the corporate office. Kenwood took regional stores, polled into one central area and polled that information into the corporate office," explains Mainwaring. By using Linux, which is cross-platform, the company could move from Windows at the store level into the corporate UNIX environment.

The cross-platform capability of Linux provides VARs with another advantage, because it enables them to address wider end-user needs than usual, according to Giggall.

Still, Linux may not be perfect for everyone. "Linux is easy to install, but it's still a techie-type of product," says Giggall. "The installation side of it is where the knowledge has to be. There's not a lot of competition, but VARs still need to know

what they're doing."

"There aren't drivers available for all components," Mainwaring explains. "It's not plug-and-play. Linux has to move in that direction if it's to succeed as a universal product to replace Windows or to partner with it in the mass market."

"There are definite opportunities that Linux creates: it is in-between the upper-end NT and lower-end peer-to-peer when it comes to cost, it has stability and it's open source. As long as VARs are willing to invest in technical knowledge, they can address wider markets, better address the needs of their clients and build customer satisfaction," says Giggal.

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