

Linux Vendors Welcome Dell's Prebundling Move

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While officials for Red Hat and Novell's SUSE have welcomed the move as good for the industry, they also downplayed its competitive significance.

Leading Linux distributors Red Hat and Novell's SUSE have welcomed the news that Dell is going to prebundle Ubuntu Linux on certain consumer machines, saying the move is good for society, customers and the industry.

"It's great news that Dell has decided to join other OEMs in delivering Linux desktops. Demand for Linux clients is increasing across the board and we're glad to see this further evidence of the inexorable expansion of open source to new users and new markets," Scott Crenshaw, the vice president of Red Hat's enterprise Linux platform business, said May 1.

For Justin Steinman, Novell's director of marketing for Linux and open source, the move is just one more proof point in the continued growth of Linux.

"As proponents of open source and Linux, we're happy to see Linux being preloaded onto consumer desktops."

But Steinman then downplayed its significance. "I wouldn't necessarily refer to the Dell-Ubuntu deal as 'major.' Dell is only going to load Ubuntu on three machines targeted at the technical consumer market, and the only support option available will be through online technical

self-help forums, which will be monitored by the community," he said.

However, Jane Silber, Canonical's director of operations in London, told eWEEK that the company will provide commercial Ubuntu support for customers who choose to buy this through the Dell Web site when available.

But, for Novell, Dell's announcement is nothing more than the loading of Linux onto desktops aimed at the technical enthusiast community - the same community of people who voted on Dell's IdeaStorm Web site . These are not Novell's target customers for the Linux desktop, Steinman said.

"Our target customer is the enterprise business user, and so we've focused SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop squarely at the business market," Steinman said.

"We believe the Linux desktop is ready for mainstream deployment in the enterprise, and that means you need to have enterprise quality support - something that Ubuntu does not offer."

Novell, Steinman then claimed, was in "serious conversations with several leading hardware OEMs" about preloading a Linux desktop that will be targeted at broad enterprise use.

"When we release SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop on a preloaded machine, it will come with the enterprise support that our customers require to run their businesses. Stay tuned for more details," he said.

Red Hat's Crenshaw also offered up a litany of reasons why the deal with Dell was not appropriate for Red Hat, saying that while the Raleigh, N.C., company continues to invest in delivering client solutions, "we won't be all things to all people."

Red Hat was focusing on encouraging the growth of free and open-source software, as this created better software, communities and value, he said.

While Red Hat was also approached by hardware vendors about preloading its software onto desktop or laptop computers, the company said that it pursues these deals "when the arrangement makes appropriate financial and strategic sense...Buying market share is an easy way to get headlines, but doesn't build a sustainable business model, which allows continued support or investment," Crenshaw said.

He said that Red Hat decided to focus its client investment in a few key areas because the company doesn't think it is its their mission to build a Windows clone.

"We think it's our mission is to make computing better, more accessible and more powerful. In Red Hat parlance, we want to democratize technology," Crenshaw said.

But, that being said, Crenshaw expressed the hope that the Dell-Ubuntu project is successful.

"The real win for everyone is accelerated adoption of open source," he said.

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