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Market Roundup
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By Charles King

At LinuxWorld 2002 in San Francisco, HP announced its post-merger Linux strategy, along with an updated portfolio of Linux products and services. Enhancements to the company's product portfolio include the HP Print Server Appliance 4200, a new Linux-based appliance that supports both HP and non-HP printers; the Disaster Tolerant Solution for Linux, a combination of HP MC/Serviceguard 2.0 and the HP Storageworks XP disk array portfolio; expanded Linux support for Evo desktop PCs in selected regions including Eastern Europe and mainland China, HP Secure OS for Linux 2.0; and the new HP Software Porting Assessment Service, aimed at migrating users of AIX, Solaris and other UNIX environments to HP's Linux solutions. In addition, HP announced a Linux grant program for universities, and its support of Linux initiatives focused at ISVs and industry groups.

In a series of announcements, IBM expanded its Linux-focused hardware, software and service portfolios. The company introduced the x335, which the company described as the industry's first Xeon-based 1U rack-optimized server. The x335 is designed for Web application serving which can also be incorporated (with the x345) into the new eServer Cluster 1350, an integrated and validated Linux-based solution that includes storage products, third party networking, and cluster management software. Along with conventional clustering applications (such as database solutions), IBM described the Cluster 1350 as ideal for grid computing deployments. IBM also announced that Tivoli Storage Manager has been expanded to support Linux running on Intel-based servers. Additionally, the company announced the formation of a comprehensive program designed to help customers transition from the Sun Solaris platform to Linux-based IBM eServers. As part of the program, IBM migration experts including system architects, database administrators, project managers, and OS specialists will prepare assessments of customers' Sun Solaris infrastructures and develop step-by-step transitioning blueprints.

In a sense, we regard these announcements from HP and IBM as representing two sides of the Linux coin. The common goal (or gold) here is in both companies' use of Linux as a tool to migrate customers from other UNIX platforms (i.e., Sun) to their own hardware. But HP and IBM are chasing the prize down different paths. While cultivating a deepening interest in Open Source solutions, HP has been quick to take advantage a host of Linux riches derived from its merger with Compaq. The fact is that the profusion of Compaq Proliant servers made them ideal boxes for companies to use in initial, tactical Linux deployments. HP's product and service announcements suggest that the company is still taking an essentially tactical line in its Linux efforts, aiming primarily at markets and niches that could eventually generate substantial revenues. HP's new Print Server Appliance 4200 is a natural fit for printer-dependent HP, as is the new Disaster Tolerant solution, which leverages existing software and storage offerings. Adding Linux support for the company's Evo line makes eminent sense in China and Eastern Europe, where desktop Linux is actually gaining a bit of traction.

IBM's approach to Linux has been considerably more strategic than its vendor brethren. The company has certainly been aggressive in driving Linux compatibility across all of its product lines, and the rack-optimized x335 and Cluster 1350 are simply the latest iterations of this effort. But rather than simply regarding Linux as a tool for offering short-term appeasement to Microsoft-weary customers, we believe IBM is taking a longer view, seeing Linux as a lingua franca OS that could eventually, seamlessly run across the company's entire hardware portfolio. We regard that as a powerful vision that, over time, could prove essential to enabling grid and utility computing environments that IBM envisions for the future.

Pew Project Reports "Digital Disconnect" among Internet-Savvy Students
By Charles King

The Pew Internet in American Life Project reported the results of a recent survey focused on how U.S. students are using the Internet to assist them in their studies. According to the study, three in five children under 18 and 78% of students between the ages of 12 and 17 go online, and Internet-savvy students used the Web as a resource for researching reports and other school projects, as well as for virtual tutoring and study shortcuts. The Internet also provides a critical means for students to communicate with other students and instructors. In addition, participants see the Internet as a key resource for finding information they need to help them in making important life, education, and professional decisions. At the same time, students believe that schools, administrators, and many teachers do not recognize how important the Internet's role is in the educational process. Survey participants noted sources for this disconnect including wide variations in Internet usage between schools, poor use of online resources among teachers, policy decisions made by administrators unaware of how the Internet is being used in individual classrooms, and wide divergence in computer literacy among their student peers. As a result, many respondents believe roadblocks have arisen that discourage them from using the Internet as fully and as creatively as they would like. As part of the Pew study, students suggested a number of ways their school-related online experience could be improved including better coordinating in and out of school Internet activities, increasing the time and quality of online access, improving teachers' Internet skills, and better educating policy makers. The Pew survey was based on information gathered from fourteen gender-balanced, racially diverse focus groups of 136 students drawn from thirty-six different schools. In addition, the study data was supplemented by nearly 200 students who voluntarily submitted online essays about their use of the Internet for school.

Differences of opinion between high school students and their teachers and administrators are hardly headline news. In fact, teenage disaffection is a generally recognized historical constant, and has fueled something of a growth industry since Baby Boomers (and their offspring and grand-offspring) swung into the Blackboard Jungle. But to our way of thinking, the discontent noted by Pew Project might signal a sea change of sorts in the importance of teenage angst, at least when it is Internet-related. The fact is that for many of the current crop of teens, the Internet has been a constant since birth. Mix online awareness with increasing media savvy, a hunger for IP-based messaging and the killer hand/eye coordination developed from hours of video gaming, and you have a generation of kids who are generally more knowledgeable about the Internet and therefore far more scary than their elders are entirely comfortable with. What does this portend for those involved? Concerning online issues, instructors and administrators may be well advised to admit that the kids they are "teaching" about the Internet are often far better versed in the subject than their elders are and perhaps ever will be. This is not a bad thing. At a time when many American public schools and their students are struggling financially and academically, the Pew survey suggests that information available online could provide added relevance to high school education, or even a competitive edge. The message of the Pew survey is both simple and clear: Students are using the Internet to improve their school work. Do not stand in their way. We have fewer overall concerns for the kids involved. For generations, teenagers have been remarkably adept at obtaining what they want or need despite the best efforts of generations of obstructive adults. We do not expect Internet access to shake out any differently.