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Is IBM close to avenging OS/2?s death?

By *srlinuxx*
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It?s been almost 15 years since Microsoft jilted IBM?s OS/2 at the altar, kicking Big Blue while it was already down (financially), and exacerbating the old school company?s global state of disarray ? one that outsider (IBM?s first ever) Lou Gerstner managed to turn around after he was brought on board in 1993. One year later, a group of Gerstner?s handpicked technical advisors identified Sun?s Java as the strategic technology on which some of IBM?s fortunes could be protected or regained from Bill Gates, who, with a roadmap for Windows NT then firmly under his belt, was beginning to turn his attention towards one of IBM?s most coveted domains: its data centers.

In the decade since, IBM has downplayed any insinuation that it?s been seeking revenge for the way Microsoft defeated it and OS/2, often highlighting its continued sales of Windows desktops, notebooks, and servers as evidence of a healthy partnership between the two companies. But insiders know better. Call it what you want ? good engineering, great marketing, or foul play ? Windows dominated desktops and notebooks and was vanquishing its competitors on the server front (mainly Novell, but the Unixes too), which meant that IBM, and other systems manufacturers, were left with no choice but to bow to Sir Gates. For many, it came as no surprise that, once Linux showed promise as a way to derail Windows? momentum on the server front, IBM would throw its weight behind the upstart OS as well as other industry currents (eg: open source) that stood a chance of undermining Microsoft.

Over these years, as a student of the on-again off-again relationship between IBM and Microsoft, I have written many times that the relationship?s status, invariably, can be connected to one?s desire to take away the other?s customers, or, at the very least, disadvantage the competitor in some way. When the relationship is off, it?s almost as if one, the other, or both have thrown down some gauntlet. For example, IBM?s recent backing of an EU crackdown on Microsoft makes the company?s current Microsoft disposition pretty clear. When the relationship is on, the rivals have a mutual goal. For example, when Microsoft and IBM got together to form the Web Services Interoperability organization (the WS-I), lack of interoperability between IBM?s Java-based Web services solutions and Microsoft?s .NET-based Web services solutions was not only a fundamental impediment to Web services adoption, but also a barrier to easily substituting one company?s solutions for the other?s. It?s a relationship that I?ve described before as being Eastwood-Van Cleefish in nature.

But, in addition to IBM?s recent backing of the EU, is IBM making other moves at Microsoft?s jugular? Taken together, do these moves signal a more concerted effort on IBM?s part to further distance itself from Microsoft, an effort that could ultimately avenge the death of OS/2? Let?s take into consideration some of the more recent news coming out of IBM.

Full Story [2].

Software

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