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MARKETPLACE UPDATE

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Easing the Open Source Journey – IBM Migration Factory - Solaris to Linux

By Charles King

On May 17, 2005 IBM and Red Hat announced a new program aimed at helping Sun Microsystems customers move their IT workloads to Linux. A significant part of that effort focuses on the IBM Migration Factory - Solaris to Linux, a commercial offering based on the knowledge and expertise IBM has acquired by completing more than 500 engagements with Sun and HP customers through the IBM Migration Factory since 2004. The program complements IBM's eServer Application Advantage for Linux (AKA Chiphopper) offering, which is designed to help ISVs with existing x86-based initial Linux applications develop and deliver cross-platform Linux solutions. In addition, the IBM Migration Factory - Solaris to Linux works with Novell/SuSE solutions and is available to customers choosing that Linux distribution.

IBM and Red Hat are producing a series of offerings and events aimed at sparking interest in and better understanding of the Solaris to Linux migration. Chief among these will be IBM providing free migration assessments for qualified customers, which aim to help them look at the business and technical considerations associated with migration. In addition, IBM, Red Hat, and their associated partners are sponsoring a series of events aimed at educating customers, developers, and solutions providers about the benefits of migrating from Solaris to Linux.

Opening Opportunities

The rise of enterprise Linux has followed a path unlike the one most Open Source proponents envisioned a half decade ago, who considered it a potential threat to Microsoft's dominance on the desktop. Open Source discovered its first and best toehold in business servers, but while many supporters believed the OS would drive powerful alternatives to Windows server products, Linux' greatest success has come at the cost of traditional UNIX solutions.

There are good reasons for this. First, similarities between Linux and UNIX variants simplified the adoption process, a critical issue for IT staff who helped spark Linux adoption and development. In addition, the evolution of Linux has paralleled the successful growth of x86 servers across a widening range of business server solutions. Originally relegated to the edges of the corporate network, companies are increasingly deploying x86 servers in business-critical areas once considered the sole domains of enterprise-class solutions. Finally, the refinement of clustering technologies has resulted in Linux/x86 playing an ever-expanding role in high performance computing (HPC), helping these technologies to drive whole new classes of affordable business solutions.

At the same time Open Source was enjoying growing success among business customers, traditional UNIX solutions from Hewlett Packard (HP) and Sun Microsystems were mired in a serious rough patch, though for quite different reasons. After its historic acquisition of Compaq, many of HP's core PA-RISC, Alpha, and Tandem/Non-Stop customers appeared to lose their enthusiasm for the company's long-planned migration to Intel's Itanium platform. HP's situation was complicated further by unexpected potholes that dotted its enterprise products roadmap. As a result, the company's customers became prime targets for competing UNIX and Linux/x86 solutions, with a faltering HP caught firmly in the middle.

Sun's self-inflicted challenges were significantly more severe. The company's long-standing devotion to its proprietary UltraSPARC/Solaris platform and derision of all things Intel made it difficult for Sun to construct, let alone adhere to, consistent x86 and Linux strategies. This issue became increasingly damaging as IBM and other competitors reaped expanding benefits from their own proactive Open Source efforts. With its market share continuing to fade, Sun recently began more aggressive x86 and Linux efforts built around the release of Solaris 10 and the company's partnership with AMD. Whether customers are willing to accompany Sun during this ongoing evolution remains far from certain, especially given the wide range of x86 and Linux options available from other vendors.

Making a Market

But as every successful vendor knows, simply taking advantage of competitors' mistakes is no way to ensure success. The new IBM Migration Factory - Solaris to Linux offers an example of how vendors can create strategic commercial offerings out of tactical custom engagements. Practically speaking, the offering does not represent an entirely new effort but simply formalizes a set of ad hoc services the companies have long offered in concert. There are very good reasons for the partners to do so. Though it currently represents about 10% of the total server market, Linux server revenue and unit growth is handily outpacing its rivals with no signs of slowing, let alone stopping. In addition, IBM has stated that approximately one quarter of the 12,000 Linux customer engagements it has completed worldwide since 1999 were Solaris to Linux migrations. In other words, market for specialized Solaris-to-Linux offerings appears significant and well-established.

Perhaps most importantly, the effort leverages both companies' considerable experience in Linux deployments, along with their ongoing investments in Open Source solutions, services, and partnerships. The result is the availability of over 6,000 Linux applications that run on IBM servers. That number should increase significantly as a result of the company's efforts, such as the recently announced Chiphopper program, which aims to help Linux ISVs port their applications and tools across all of IBM's IT platforms. In addition, the IBM Migration Factory - Solaris to Linux takes prime advantage of the application porting employees, assets, and intellectual property IBM acquired from Sector7 in September 2003.

Focus on the Factory

The IBM Migration Factory - Solaris to Linux focuses on three basic areas for potential Linux customers; education, assessment, and services:

- **Education** – IBM and its channel partners are offering a series of Linux seminars, summits, and classes for IT professionals in U.S. locations that will expand to locations worldwide. The company is producing a 35 city Solaris to OpenPOWER tour designed to demonstrate the benefits offered by IBM’s Linux-specific pSeries solutions, and IBM also offers a wide range of publications and assessment tools available through the ibm.com/linux/advantage Web site.
- **Assessment** – For qualifying businesses that believe migrating to Linux offers a viable alternative to their current Sun infrastructures, IBM provides free migration assessments to help them understand the processes, requirements, and costs involved. According to IBM, the company has completed over 250 free assessments and reviewed more than 230 migrations in the 2004/1Q 2005 timeframe, resulting in more than \$170 million in shipped initial orders for IBM solutions.
- **Services** – IBM also offers for-fee services, including access to Migration Factory personnel who will help customers migrate Solaris C/C++ environments to Linux. In addition, they will assist customers in migrating Oracle databases from non-IBM Windows and UNIX platforms to Red Hat and Novell SUSE Linux on IBM platforms. IBM Migration Factory - Solaris to Linux services are designed to help customers analyze and identify porting issues, and remediate code issues for quick compiling and linking.

Mission Accomplished?

Making new markets requires the successful intersection of opportunity and expertise. From that standpoint, the IBM Migration Factory - Solaris to Linux appears well-positioned to prosper. Despite Sun’s redefined Linux strategy and aggressive pursuit of x86-based solutions, its potential for success in these areas remains far from certain. Given IBM and Red Hat’s achievements in these areas, the pair’s targeting of Solaris customers is likely to cause further trouble for their already troubled competitor. Far from being a new or untested effort, the IBM Migration Factory - Solaris to Linux qualifies as the next step in a natural progression of Open Source solutions from vendors whose capabilities have been tested and proven. Overall, businesses considering a shift from Sun to Open Source solutions would be well-advised to investigate offerings from the IBM Migration Factory - Solaris to Linux.

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