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IBM program aimed at cultivating Linux ISVs

Unix boxes, mainframes and minicomputers are targets of initiative

By Robert McMillan, IDG News Service
February 14, 2005

IBM (Profile, Products, Articles) is readying a number of new marketing programs that the computer giant hopes will encourage another 6,000 independent software vendors (ISVs) to port their software to the Linux operating system over the next three years. At the Linuxworld Conference & Expo in Boston Tuesday, the company will unveil its IBM eServer Application Server Advantage for Linux initiative, code-named Chiphopper, which is designed to ease the job of making Linux software run across all of IBM's servers.

As part of the Chiphopper program, IBM is providing ISVs with porting and testing software to help them create software that runs across IBM's hardware, including the pSeries Unix systems, zSeries mainframes, and iSeries minicomputers. Software vendors will also be given access to IBM testing centers and marketing dollars to help promote their products on Linux.

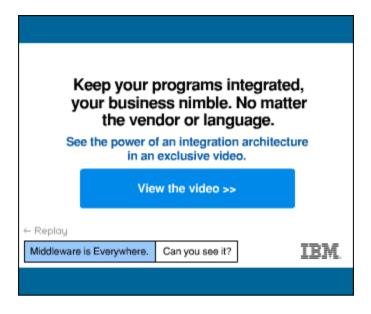"We've been saying since 2000 that

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Linux will do for applications what the Internet did for networks," said Scott Handy, IBM's Linux vice president. "Linux will make all application platforms look like one, and we think that's a good idea."

Using the Chiphopper software, vendors can find out if any parts of their code are dependent on a particular type of hardware, and they can see if the code conforms to the Linux Standard Base specification, a set of standards that defines the Linux platform. "An ISV can take a single source code base and run it across multiple chip architectures," he said.

IBM already has 6,000 Linux applications listed in its Global Solutions Directory of partner applications. The company hopes that Chiphopper will help raise this number to 12,000 by the end of 2007, Handy said. "We expect that some of these ISVs who hadn't done Linux at all will say, 'Now I will,'" he said.

Though Linux is most popular on chips that use **Intel** (Profile, Products, Articles) 's x86 instruction set, IBM has long envisioned it as a standard platform for its various server architectures. It has credited Linux with a resurgence in the zSeries mainframe computers, and recently IBM began shipping some servers based on its Power processors that are designed to run Linux rather than IBM's own AIX operating system.

IBM's efforts may be paying off. In 2004, 40 percent of the company's Linux hardware sales were on non-x86 systems, said Handy. One of the goals of the Chiphopper program is to give ISVs a way to reach that emerging market, he said.

Handy wouldn't say how that figure compared with the total number of servers shipped by IBM.

The program's most important feature will be the marketing resources, said Gerald Cohen, chief executive officer of **Information Builders** (Profile, Products, Articles), a software vendor based in New York.

"The theory is, if everybody said, 'We run on Linux,' it would make it easier for IBM to push Linux," said Cohen, whose company is participating in the program. "It's really making it more appealing to customers."

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