

Sun Opens New Front in OS Wars With Solaris 10

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The Solaris 10 operating system (OS) may be Sun Microsystems' biggest bet on its future in five years. But Sun's effort at a turnaround will likely not affect the market until late 2005.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 15 November 2004, Sun introduced Solaris 10. New features include:

- Free open-source OS code available by subscription, costing — according to Sun — 30 percent to 50 percent less than Red Hat's Linux on x86 servers
- "Container" technology that enables customers to consolidate and isolate multiple, distributed applications under one copy of the OS
- A trace, debug and optimizer tool (Dtrace) that Sun claims can enhance performance by 30 to 300 percent when applied to legacy application code or OS code execution
- Improved levels of predictive self-healing to reduce downtime
- An enhanced file system (ZFS) that Sun claims is far more scalable and reliable than current Unix file systems
- Functionally equivalent versions of the OS for Solaris' x86 and Scalable Processor Architecture (SPARC) platforms

Sun plans to release most of the OS code to an open-source community development process. The company also promises a Red Hat Linux execution environment (the Janus project) by 1Q05.

Analysis

In recent years, many enterprises running Solaris have expressed dismay about Sun's loss of price/performance and product leadership. The release of Solaris 10 aims to revive some of Sun's past aggressiveness and turn the tables on its chief Unix and Linux competitors — IBM and Hewlett-Packard/HP — by borrowing the collaboration process from the open-source community for adding innovations.

The market will likely not feel the impact of these turnaround efforts until 4Q05. In the meantime, Gartner will monitor Sun and measure its success on its ability to:

- Renew interest in Solaris and slow competitive Unix and Linux momentum, especially by reducing defections by Solaris customers
- Generate renewed enthusiasm for SPARC and x86 among independent software vendors
- Slow IBM's and HP's incursions into the high-end market
- Create a complementary downstream high-volume Solaris strategy on Advanced Micro Device's Opteron processors and make up revenue losses with high-end SPARC sales
- Create and extend the pervasive use of Java-based middleware on Solaris

Recommendations:

- **Enterprises now running Solaris:** Introduce Solaris 10 pilot projects and benchmark performance to verify Sun's claims.

- **All Solaris customers and prospects:** Do not view Solaris 10 as excluding Linux. Exercise caution when considering the subscription model, because Sun has not unveiled it on high-end systems. Solaris containers address one approach to consolidation, but may not be a good fit for all applications.

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Sun Microsystems Solaris Operating System" — The upcoming Solaris 10 product may help Sun rejuvenate its server business. **By Mary I. Hubley and Cynthia R. Lubrano**
- "Sun, Fujitsu Customers Can Benefit From Server Convergence" — This agreement expands customers' access to products that have not been readily available and increases competition. **By Paul McGuckin and Andrew Butler**

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