

OpenSolaris on the Right Track but Won't Derail Linux

George J. Weiss

Sun Microsystems will release Solaris source code to the public through an open-source software (OSS) license. The move will help stem erosion of Solaris's market but won't slow Linux's momentum.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 25 January 2005, Sun announced that it will release the source code for its Solaris 10 operating system (OS) under the Common Development and Distribution License (CDDL), and grant access to more than 1,600 patents. Source code for the DTrace feature of Solaris 10 is available now at www.opensolaris.org, a new community site, and Sun will release additional Solaris code in 2Q05.

Analysis

Sun deserves credit for contributing content to the public domain, even if the move advances Sun's business goals by:

- Creating a new OSS community, through which Sun hopes to stimulate a broad ecosystem of Solaris-related technologies while driving developer enthusiasm. Sun has a history of supporting open-source and academic efforts, but new OSS initiatives (notably Linux) have stolen much of that thunder. Recapturing it would help Sun keep enterprise accounts seeded with, and influenced by, new generations of Solaris-savvy IT talent.
- Helping to counter the competitive threat of Linux at the low end of the Solaris server market. The 2004 launch of Solaris on x86 was an earlier step against this threat. Now, Sun can point to OpenSolaris as an open-source alternative to Linux that offers the reassurance of vendor responsibility, especially in assuming patent infringement risks on behalf of users.

OpenSolaris probably won't derail Linux, which has too much momentum. But Gartner does expect it to help Sun stem some of the erosion in Solaris adoption in high-volume servers. Success will depend on how the initiative takes shape in areas such as the community decision-making process, source code adoption and the transfer of innovations through Sun. Such details won't be clear until OpenSolaris moves beyond the first phase, which will include selecting members of the governing advisory board.

Recommendations:

- The CDDL license is most beneficial to third-party developers, including universities and derivative-product makers (such as embedded and original-equipment manufacturers); corporate Solaris users will likely see business as usual and should stick with Sun's branded and certified OS.
- Established Sun users deciding between Linux and Solaris on x86 servers — and whose management is sensitive to potential patent and litigation issues — should consider OpenSolaris as a way to help to mitigate risk vs. Linux.
- Sun customers already planning to migrate to Solaris 10 should expect no major impact from OpenSolaris, unless they have the internal skills to use OSS development to optimize performance and security.

Analytical Source: George Weiss, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Sun Opens New Front in OS Wars With Solaris 10" — The launch of Solaris 10 may be Sun's biggest bet on its future in five years. **By George Weiss and others**
- "Challenges Confront Linux and Sun on Wall Street" — Many large investment banks face challenging decisions regarding Linux, Red Hat and Sun. **By George Weiss and David Furlonger**

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