

CONTROL ENGINEERING_{UK}

Control, Instrumentation and Automation in the Process and Manufacturing Industries

inl

June/July 2008

Krohne's giant size straight-tube
Coriolis mass flowmeter, p18



REPRINT
In Germany, Open Source Takes Hold

Details of MIS overhaul, p44

Machine vision for lamp manufacturer, p54

Tracking chocolate, p56

Renault gets the most out of infrared camera, p58

In Germany, Open Source Takes Hold

Linux has been around for fifteen years, and has achieved successful penetration into many IT market segments. It is predominantly known for its use in servers, where it is supported by all the major players—IBM, Dell, Hewlett-Packard, and Sun Microsystems—as well as mobile telephones and PlayStation 3.

On the other hand, it has never done so well in computer-based industrial controls, and I think this is because it requires the intense co-operation among vendors to make it work. It needs the support of a broad community of machine builders and developers to help with development and to share the costs. It is not just another new technology, it is a new business philosophy as well.

But that is starting to change, with the formation of the Open Source Automation Development Lab (OSADL; www.osadl.org) two years ago. Dr. Carsten Emde, the organisation's manager, says it is modelled after its acronym-sake, the OSDL and what OSDL has done for Linux in general, the OSADL aims to do for Linux in automation.

To give you some idea of how differently the Linux world operates, the OSADL people like to tell the following story. Imagine a conversation between a project manager and a purchasing agent at a machine building company that develops its own automation software.

Project Manager: 'We need to get someone to develop a Linux driver for our new machine controller. Here's a purchase order for the work.'



Dr. Carsten Emde

would ensure fair distribution of development costs, says Dr. Emde. As a result, one of the OSADL's key roles is to act as a 'purchase community' in which membership fees help delegate the development of widely endorsed open source projects.

'Interestingly, the vendors were not worried about making sources available *per se*, but rather they did not want to pay for the development of a certain software component that others—possibly competitors—could use free of charge. Therefore, they wanted a mechanism that would ensure a fairer distribution

Linux has been around for fifteen years, and has achieved successful penetration into many IT market segments.

Purchasing Department: 'Hm... Let me check the purchase order to make sure it follows our standard procedure: Non-disclosure agreement to be executed, source code going into company's safe....'

Project Manager: 'Nope, we're going with Open Source. The source code gets published on the Internet.'

Purchasing Department: 'What? We're paying for the development but the source code goes out to the Internet? If everybody can use the source code, why are we the only ones paying for this? No way this can fly!'

OSADL emerged when industrial automation manufacturers decided they wanted to define a mechanism to make source code widely available in a way that

of software development costs. This is what led to the founding of OSADL in the late summer of 2006.

At its first anniversary last year, the organisation had grown to 17 members, up from the original 11. And it had a magnificent, successful looking stand in Hall 17 at Hannover Fair.



Michael Babb, editor
michael.babb@ntlworld.com