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Ellison: Oracle's "whole business" will run on Linux

By James Niccolai
January 31, 2002 4:49 pm PT

REDWOOD SHORES, CALIF. -- Oracle is about to replace three [Unix servers](#) that run the bulk of its business applications with a cluster of Intel [servers](#) running Linux, Oracle Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Larry Ellison said Wednesday. He also predicted the "inevitable" demise of large [servers](#) systems, exposing a potential conflict of interest with longtime ally Sun Microsystems.

The Oracle chief made his comments while touting the benefits of Oracle's clustering technology to an audience of financial analysts here. Clustering allows customers to run applications or a [database](#) across a group of relatively low-cost Intel [servers](#), with the goal of reducing costs and boosting reliability.

Instead of upgrading three of its older Hewlett-Packard [Unix servers](#), Oracle will move its application [server](#) and business software to Linux-based Intel machines later this year, Ellison said. "We'll be on Linux no later than the summer, so we'll be running our whole business on Linux," he said.

It wasn't clear exactly which applications would be moved to Linux, but the Oracle chief portrayed it as a significant step. He favors Intel [servers](#) because they are "cheap" and can be easily replaced, he said, and he picked Linux over Microsoft Windows because Linux is "much safer if you're on the Internet." Ellison is a longtime Microsoft foe.

Oracle is also working closely with Linux provider Red Hat to offer customers preconfigured [servers](#) loaded with Oracle's application [server](#), Ellison said. "You'll see us taking full support responsibility for Linux," he said. "If you're running the app [server](#) and something goes wrong, call us and we'll come and fix it."

Promoting smaller Intel-based [servers](#) would appear to put Oracle at odds with Sun, which makes powerful [servers](#) based on its Solaris version of [Unix](#). Both Intel and Microsoft have worked hard to boost the performance of their products in a bid to move up the food chain and compete in Sun's more profitable, higher-end market.

Asked by an analyst here what the growth of Intel-based [servers](#) could mean for [Unix](#) vendors like Sun, Ellison seemed to lose his stride for a moment.

"Things will move slowly," he said, adding that many customers aren't convinced yet that clustering even works. "It will be several years before the big machine dies," he said, "but inevitably the big machine will die."

An appropriate set-up for some businesses might be to use midrange [servers](#) for the [database](#) and smaller [servers](#) for their applications, he said. However, "in

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a couple of years it's not inconceivable that we could be recommending (Intel-based [servers](#)) for everything," Ellison said. "It's not out of the question."

Asked earlier if Sun and Oracle are now competitors, since Sun sells an application [server](#) that competes with Oracle's, Ellison delivered a friendly potshot.

"I have this conversation with Scott a lot," he said, referring to Sun Chairman and CEO Scott McNealy. "He always wonders if I'm mad at him for going into competitive markets, and the answer is no, because I don't think they stand a chance. Bless their heart, it's not what they do well. I think it's going to be really hard for an open standards company like that to get deep into the software business."

Besides their mutual dislike of Microsoft, Oracle is a firm supporter of Sun's Java technology, and the two companies have been closely aligned since the mid-90s in their support of network-based computing.

James Niccolai is San Francisco bureau chief for the IDG News Service, an InfoWorld affiliate.

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