

Config-file markup idea, R'ingFC

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From: Everett Ender (*supergiantpotato_at_yahoo.co.jp*)

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To: redhat-list@redhat.com

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I've been considering the effort that RedHat is putting into GUI-based configuration utilities, and the process could be considerably streamlined if there were some way of writing just one configuration utility and having it understand all the configuration files. This would be, in effect, a configuration browser. How to facilitate this though...

It certainly cannot be one huge program that takes every single configuration file in the UNIXish world into account within the actual code. And on the other hand we cannot help but piss off the majority of old school, hard-corps, command-line savants if we alter the UNIX configuration concept so much that it only makes sense from the GUI...

So how about a config-file markup language, a sort of CFML? To not interfere with the original config file format, it could exist only in extra comment lines within the config file itself, and nothing would really be changed. Just a few additional, otherwise ignored lines prefacing each system-read entry. These mark-ups would simply tell the configuration browser how to display its data, what type of selections/postions/buttons/sliders to use for what, etc, and perhaps even guide it to a secondary comment/help/explanation-for-people-like-my-mother file that would, to the user, be an integrated help system pertaining to whatever they are configuring.

How many times have newer users (such as myself) toyed with config settings merely to see what they do and if we could actually find what we were looking for? Yes, the settings are well-documented in comment lines within the config files themselves -- which is great for people who know where the config files live and happen to know enough about command-line administration to not be afraid of

RedHat: Config-file markup idea, R'ingFC

playing around in that dark and creepy world — but not very useful for your average "I want to click this and have it do what its supposed to do" user.

These non-command-line users are exactly who RedHat (and more broadly, the open-source community as a whole) must target and cater to if they wish to really make any serious attempts to win over the public. Nobody wants to learn advanced Linux admin skills just so they can buy Tribes2 for \$30 and not buy WinXP for \$200. They want to read a little advice pop-up, see that some config setting has "(recommended)" written beside it, click those, and have things happen as they are supposed to, and usually do, happen in the Windows world.

That's where that \$200 goes in the minds of the WinXP user who went to the trouble to compare RedHat and WinXP and chose WinXP because they didn't want to have to learn anything new or join a discussion group or a LUG or experience the support of the Linux community first-hand. One-click functionality. We have got to catch up there.

Any further ideas or comments? I think it is simply inefficient to be developing a new configuration application every time you want to GUI-ize some deeply system-related behaviour. This is, without any doubt, exactly where Windows and OSX are kicking RedHat squarely in the ass with the average user... which sucks... because people like me want to see RedHat become the norm for home desktops so we can share all the cool free stuff with our friends and spur better and broader game development.

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