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Lagging job market affects Linux pros, too

When economy rebounds, demand expected to pick up for skills to run low-cost system

07/28/2002

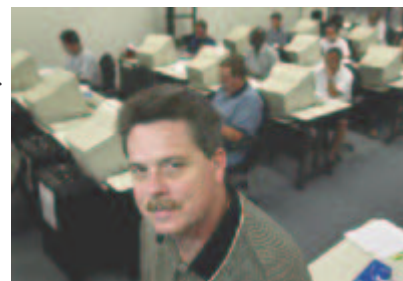
By [VICTOR GODINEZ](#) / The Dallas Morning News

Linux is pushing into the corporate world as an inexpensive alternative to Microsoft's Windows operating system, but experts say the job market for Linux professionals, like the market for all tech workers, is lagging.

"I am a Linux programmer, and I've been looking for a job for about three months now," said Jeff Rush, president of the Dallas-Fort Worth Unix Users Group.

Linux was developed in the early 1990s in Finland by Linus Torvalds, an amateur software developer. It's based on the older Unix operating system, but Mr. Torvalds created Linux as an open-source project – in other words, it's free to download, use and modify.

Linux first gained popularity as an underground alternative to Windows. It has since grown into a powerful software platform that is widely used in business on desktop computers or, more



Michael Mulvey / DMN

Richard Middleton, OS/apps program manager for Southern Methodist University's Advanced Computer Education Center in Plano, says his Unix class is full, but he hasn't held a Linux class in a few months.

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commonly, on servers.

Brian Finley, a contract Linux software developer in Dallas, said that Linux professionals were particularly hard hit by the dot-com crash.

"A lot of the people in the Linux market were at the time working for dot-coms or in a related industry because those companies were less conservative and they were early adopters of Linux," he said. "So a lot of the Linux developers at that point ended up losing their jobs."

Dan Frye, director of IBM Corp.'s Linux Technology Center, said that Linux is in an employment lull.

"We're certainly not hiring as fast as we have in the past," he said. "Linux is not immune to the basic economic realities, but the difference is that because it provides a low-cost alternative, customers are deploying Linux in many cases because of the reduced costs."

IBM has been the most prominent Linux supporter in the corporate world, investing about \$1 billion to refine the software and use it in the IT services it offers clients.

Richard Middleton, OS/apps program manager for Southern Methodist University's Advanced Computer Education Center in Plano, said he hasn't had enough applicants to schedule the school's Linux class for the last few months.

But he said that his Unix class is usually full, and many of those students go on to learn Linux on their own.

"There's still a steady job demand," Mr. Middleton said. "I don't think anything is as great as it was, but we haven't seen as dramatic a drop-off as on the Windows side."

Mr. Finley, the software developer, said Linux workers have a better chance of finding work with companies that use "cluster" computing, groups of regular computers linked together to work on a single problem or set of problems, re-creating the processing power found in supercomputers.

"If you actually had to pay for an expensive operating system license for each of those hundreds of machines, the amount of money you're spending just on licensing becomes ridiculous," he said. "So this is an area where a lot of industries are seeing an advantage to using Linux technology and therefore Linux



professionals."

IBM's Mr. Frye said the demand for Linux workers is restrained only by tech's slowdown. "We see the future as fairly bright, and I think it reflects itself if you look at résumés," he said.

Job candidate Mr. Rush is optimistic, too.

"When the economy takes off, I think Linux will take off," he said.

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