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ORACLE JOINS FREE STANDARDS GROUP AT HIGHEST LEVEL

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Oracle's announcement yesterday of its "[Unbreakable Linux 2.0](#)" program, aimed squarely at Red Hat, understandably overshadowed another announcement Larry Ellison made in the same speech. The fact that Oracle will provide cut-rate support for Red Hat Linux is of course big news, and if you have any doubt that Oracle thinks so, too, check out Oracle's [home page](#) today, which is entirely dedicated to its Linux news (even featuring the commanding presence of a body-armored penguin with clear steroids-abuse issues). You'll find an audio link to Oracle CEO Larry Ellison's speech there as well. And if you check out their [News page](#), you'll see that as part of Oracle's media blitz, it issued a total of 8 press releases yesterday.

Naturally, you'll be able to find reams of news, prognostications and punditry on the Linux announcement all over the Web, so I'll focus my attention today on the press release that I find to be most interesting: the one that tracks Ellison's announcement that Oracle has joined the [Free Standards Group](#) (FSG), at the highest level of membership. You can find that press release [here](#). (Disclosure: FSG is a client of mine, and I'm also on its Board of Directors)

Why the FSG announcement is important has to do with why the FSG is important. You can begin to get a handle on that reality from the squib in the press release that summarizes what the FSG is all about:

The Free Standards Group is the standardization and certification authority for Linux. Without a commonly adopted standard, Linux could fragment, proving costly for ISVs to port their applications to the operating system and making it difficult for end users and Linux vendors alike. With the LSB, all parties - distribution vendors, ISVs and end users - benefit as it becomes easier and less costly for software vendors to target Linux, resulting in more applications available for the Linux platform. All major Linux commercial and community organizations support the Free Standards Group.

Stated even more simply, the FSG is an essential component in the Linux ecosystem. Without such a conscious and well-supported effort to keep Linux cohesive, it could fly apart. With the FSG, dynamism, creative evolution, multiplying distros and end-user freedom can continue to flourish.

Of course, the press release also includes the traditional complementary quotes from both parties, which are intended to place the announcement in context for each party. The Oracle quote, from Donald Deutsch, Oracle's Vice President, Standards Strategy and Architecture, reads as follows:

Linux is a strategic platform for Oracle. Because of that, we felt it's important that we extend our commitment to standards-based computing and join the standardization authority for the Linux community: the Free Standards Group. Their Linux Standard Base is an ideal forum to collaborate with the greater Linux ecosystem on important issues for our customer base. We look

forward to working with the FSG and its member companies to continue to drive the adoption of Linux as a solution for our enterprise customers.

I know Don well. He's a long-term standards professional who knows his stuff, and can ensure that Oracle's participation in the FSG is productive for both sides.

Jim Zemlin, FSG's Executive Director, responds in kind with this statement:

As the largest enterprise software company, Oracle is one of the most influential and important Linux software vendors. By joining the FSG they send a clear message that they support open standards. Their joining the FSG is a watershed moment for the Linux platform, showing that all major Linux software vendors have joined together to support the LSB and keep Linux from fragmenting. Their participation in our workgroup will help us meet the most pressing needs for Linux users and developers.

The fact that Oracle is joining the FSG – and at the highest level - at the same time that it announces its new commercial initiative is significant in that it publicly demonstrates Oracle's commitment to work with, rather than against, the Linux community. By both economically as well as technically supporting FSG, Oracle is helping further the cause of keeping Linux both technically strong and vendor-independent.

Supporting the FSG is important for another reason as well, because it is in the vanguard of the evolving effort to mesh open standards with open source – two methodologies that need each other but present interoperability issues of their own. For example, standards are based on agreeing to do certain things the same way every time, while a fundamental value of open source is to have the freedom to change anything, any time. Bringing these two realities into synch is no small task.

If you're curious about how FSG has solved this conundrum, you might find this detailed overview of FSG and interview with Jim Zemlin from earlier this year to be interesting: [The Free Standards Group: Squaring the Open Source/Open Standards Circle](#). The rest of the issue in which it appears also focuses on the challenges of [Bridging the Open Source – Open Standards Divide](#)

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