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GALE

Lucid lost. (Lucid Inc out of business) (Viewpoint) (Editorial). Andrew Binstock. **UNIX Review** v12.n13 (Dec 1994): pp7(1).

Abstract:

Lucid Inc, a manufacturer of C and Lisp compilers for Unix and the developer of Lucid Emacs, ceased operations in the summer of 1994. Many blame the company's demise on its failure to deliver the Energize programming environment on time and its difficult installation, others feel founder Dick Gabriel was at fault. The real problem was Lucid's failure to understand how dramatically the Unix development-tool market had changed. Sun Microsystems changed the market when it unbundled its software-development tools from Solaris and SunPro became the market leader. SunPro has exhibited a commitment to innovation and is the technological leader in such tools as compilers, debuggers and linkers. SunPro is now available for UnixWare and a version for HP-UX will be shipping soon. The product has had immense impact on the market and the surviving vendors are those with products that complement SunPro, rather than compete with it.

This summer, the UNIX software-development community lost one of its long-time participants: Lucid Inc., the manufacturer of C and Lisp compilers for UNIX and the innovator behind Lucid Emacs. In and of itself, the loss is not substantial; what is important, however, is how Lucid came to this end.

Certainly, many failures within Lucid persisted long past any reasonably excusable period: the late delivery of the Energize programming environment, its daunting installation, the lack of upgrades to the compiler, and an inability to move out of the shadow of its founder, Dick Gabriel. By the time Energize shipped and Gabriel was replaced, the company was already mortally gored. However, these two factors, while important, were not the primary cause of Lucid's downfall. The central cause was that Lucid underestimated how dramatically the market for UNIX development tools has changed. That change can be summed up in one word: SunPro.

When Sun unbundled its software-development tools from Solaris, it handed SunPro (now a division of SunSoft) the opportunity to become the leader in software-development tools. SunPro could have squandered the opportunity by marketing tools that were good enough and still have remained the number-one source of tools for Solaris. Instead, SunPro accepted the challenge with extraordinary verve and a real commitment to innovation. Its recent release of Workshop for C++ establishes SunPro as the technological leader of primary development tools (compilers, debuggers, linkers, and the like). Not satisfied with limiting this expertise to Solaris alone, SunPro now ships its tools for UnixWare and will shortly release them for HP-UX.

SunPro's tools have had an immediate chilling effect on sales from all competitors. Lucid is but one example. CenterLine's products, manifestly stellar, have had flat sales for the

last two years. MetaWare, producer of excellent compilers, confesses that UNIX sales are so low they are almost unnoticeable. Expect other companies who compete head-on with SunPro to soon show signs of being squeezed, if they are not exhibiting them already.

The survivors in this space are the companies that complement SunPro's products rather than compete with them. Not coincidentally, these companies are all doing well: Pure Software, Qualtrak, Mercury Interactive, and so forth. Firms such as Cadre and Take Five, whose products show some overlap, will need to define their distinguishing qualities early and convincingly if they expect to thrive or even survive.

The net effect shows that the forces of capitalism are much like those of evolution: the fittest survive. And when the fittest leap forward in their abilities, many weak or sick competitors are driven off or eaten. The benefits are clear: consumers such as you and me have better tools.

I shall miss Lucid because at one time its products raised the bar. But I cannot mourn its departure.

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