

The Story Behind DTL 1.0

Defining capabilities on enterprise desktops

The OSDL Desktop Linux Working Group (DTL) captures, discusses, publishes and develops Linux capabilities definitions required by demanding, enterprise-class desktop applications. The ultimate goal is to accelerate the use of Linux on enterprise desktops. The DTL Capabilities document is the work of current OSDL member companies and interested individuals. The purpose of this document is to provide an external snapshot of the work in progress to allow feedback from interested parties. When complete these capability descriptions will be used to evaluate the actual state of the Linux desktop with respect to the usage models defined by the working group. Gaps and deficiencies will be documented and expressed as use cases which can be used as reference for open source development projects to come up with solutions.

Background/History

To understand the Desktop Linux (DTL) 1.0 document created by the Open Source Development Labs (OSDL), it's important to see it from the historical prospective of the OSDL initiatives.



ABOUT LYNN DE LA TORRE

Lynn de la Torre is a member of OSDL and coordinates the activities of the DCL Working Group. Lynn has 30 years of experience in the data center, and has worked in operations, system administration, database administration, and software development. Prior to joining OSDL, Lynn was a project manager for a large data warehouse implementation.
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There are currently three OSDL initiatives: the Carrier Grade Linux initiative (CGL), the Data Center Linux initiative (DCL) and the Desktop Linux initiative.

The Carrier Grade Linux initiative was started to service a vertical industry segment that was an early Linux adopter – the telecommunications carriers. In 2000, the CGL initiative was organized to address that particular vertical. By creating a specification, the participants realized that they needed to define the basic infrastructure that supports vertical telecommunications applications more thoroughly.

The Data Center Linux initiative was meant to address the enterprise's horizontal infrastructure requirements, with a focus on the server. Thus, DCL's charter was broader in scope than CGL's.

The Desktop Linux initiative began in early 2003 when OSDL members recog-

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nized the need to address the enterprise desktop infrastructure. Early in DTL's definition phase, folks realized that its potential scope was significantly bigger than DCL's and that some focus was needed for it to succeed. So the initiative concentrated on the enterprise and the ISVs that create the ecosystem for the enterprise. The decision was consistent with DCL's focus on the enterprise.

Scope

To achieve progress on the DTL initiative its scope was reduced to manageable proportions. However, it remains a larger undertaking than any of the other OSDL initiatives.

To define the initiative further, five usage models or user segments were developed. Those segments are:

Fixed Function

This is a system that is tailored to run only one dedicated application. It is not a general-purpose desktop system, and its application automatically starts when the system boots. A typical example might be a point-of-sale terminal or an automated teller machine.

Technical Workstation

These systems run a small set of industry-specific applications. The choice of OS is secondary to the applications. Users may communicate with standard tools such as instant messaging or e-mail.

Transaction Workstation

People who use this kind of desktop machine typically run multiple customized business applications, most of which are structured or forms-based, and may or may not be accessible by a browser. These users may also browse the Web and collaborate through basic e-mail.



“The DTL 1.0 document reflects the current analysis of the DTL initiative. It is not a complete document or a technical specification.”



ABOUT CRAIG MANNING

Craig Manning is a Manager in IT in the Client Productivity Solutions group and is currently the Steering Chair for the Desktop Linux OSDL group. At Cisco, Craig is responsible for driving the current IT infrastructure forward to support an OS independent environment and working with Desktop Solutions, Collaboration Solutions, Messaging, Mobility, and Security to support this effort. Craig has been at Cisco for 10 years supporting Engineering, first as a Unix Sysadmin and then until recently managing the team that supports the San Jose Engineering Compute environment.

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ABOUT PHILIP PEAKE

Philip Peake is a member of OSDL and coordinates the Desktop Linux Working Group, which was the author of the DTL 1.0 document. Philip has over 25 years of experience with UNIX systems, applications and Internet consulting. Prior to joining OSDL Philip worked for a number of companies including Sun Microsystems, AOL, Netscape and Perot Systems. Philip has a bachelor's degree in computer science from the University of Keele.

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Basic Office

Generally these users require only basic office productivity capabilities and compatibility with other document formats. They are not heavy Microsoft Office users. When files are imported or exported, they are generally “simple” files that don’t use features such as scripting, forms or embedded tables in tables. General-purpose users more typically use those capabilities. Basic office users need basic browser functionality to access information such as corporate guidelines, parts lists or loan information. They also use e-mail to communicate and send simple documents through attachments.

General Purpose

General-purpose desktops create and modify complex documents that are used inside and outside of the users’ company. They are dependent on the Microsoft Office data format and familiar with the Microsoft Office user interface, functionality and feature set.

For the DTL initiative to make progress in a reasonable period of time, OSDL member prioritized the usage models and focused primarily on the requirements of the Fixed Function and Technical Workstation models. The first (1.0) document was just supposed to list the capabilities that would support those usage models. More detailed specifications will be addressed in later documents.

Current Status

The DTL 1.0 document reflects the current analysis of the DTL initiative. It is not a complete document or a technical specification. It is a working document that reflects what is needed on the desktop based on the priorities set. The initiative is publishing this document to open discussion and solicit feedback.

What’s Happening in the Future?

An appendix to the 1.0 document contains some areas of potential 2.0 interest. This represents a departure from previous

OSDL documents and is meant to gauge the interest of the development community and get people involved in specific 2.0 areas. The appendix listing is far from exhaustive, but identifies areas that needed greater attention than the 1.0 document could manage.

Get involved

The DTL 1.0 Capabilities document can decidedly not be used as a reference guide to build a corporate desktop. It was not intended to be. It is a “stake in the ground” that delineates where the DTL working group believes the Linux desktop needs to go to succeed in the enterprise. There will undoubtedly be people who have other opinions. These are people that the DTL working group needs to participate. The wider the participants’ background and experience, the less likely anything critical will be missed or broken as the specification evolves.

You don’t have to be a spec writer to participate. Part of the initiative’s work is to take existing software and extend it to support the required capabilities or, in some cases, develop completely new components. Wherever possible, this work is being done in collaboration with an existing open source project, which helps ensure widespread adoption and field testing. Occasionally, no suitable project exists and a new one will need to be created. Working group members and any interested external developers will typically work on these projects. Development follows open source development processes, and all work is ultimately covered by an open source license.

So whether you are an ISV, a hardware vendor, a Linux distributor, an open source developer or just someone who feels he has the appropriate skills and would like to participate in open source development, you will find some area where you can become a productive participant either in the DTL working group or in one of its Special Interest Groups (SIGs). 🚀

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