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Why Open Source Java Is Such A Big Deal

[Posted by David HM Spector](#), Nov 15, 2006 08:53 AM

Well, it's not like the [Open Sourcing of Java](#) was a great surprise to most industry observers, but this week's announcement by Sun Microsystems that it is, in fact, releasing the Java Software Development Kit and JVM, the Java Compiler, and the just-in-time byte-code compiler known as HotSpot is a Really Big Deal nonetheless.

It might not be obvious, but Java technology is perhaps the most pervasive collection of middleware and embedded system technologies of the last 50 years. It's literally everywhere, from your PDA and cell phone to almost every major enterprise software back-end and e-commerce site. Given the ubiquity of Java, one might well wonder, "Why bother?" Well, even with its widespread adoption, there are still some big issues for vendors wanting to use it in their new devices or or companies as a deployment language for their technologies:

- There has always been a large amount of trepidation among senior IT managers that one day Sun would suddenly change the rules and charge them for using Java.
- The only way to get an official certified Java implementation was to License it from Sun or write your own uncertified "clone."
- Porting Java to a new platform was costly both in fees to Sun and time to market.
- Unlike compiled languages like C, C++, or even Microsoft's Visual Basic, there is little native hardware support -- native libraries break Sun's "write once, run anywhere" paradigm, and since Sun has been the gatekeeper, there was very little incentive for third parties to invest the time and resources (and exposure of proprietary methods) to Sun in order to get native support included in the default Sun libraries.

- Support for USB devices is basically nonexistent. Sun makes big enterprise servers... very few of which come with joysticks.
- Support for high-end graphics cards and multimedia systems had languished: Sun had more or less abandoned its own high-end Java 3-D and media player frameworks. Sun is a hardware company; it wasn't practical for them to create interfaces and drivers for everyone else's hardware.

The takeaway from all this is that despite its success, Sun itself had become the bottleneck to the further adoption and growth of Java. Opening up the Java platform radically changes the Java marketplace.

Politically, this is a great move for Sun. It frees Sun from charges that a competitor could make about Java being held hostage to a single vendor. Of course, there have been alternative Java implementations available for several years (e.g., from IBM and BEA), but Sun was still the gatekeeper in terms of certification, which cost a lot of money.

Moreover Sun gets:

- Great publicity -- Sun finally gets to put itself on par with Linux in terms of being an open source community player -- although, to be fair, Sun has done more for the open source movement releasing NFS and countless other systems and specifications back in the 1980s long before anyone even knew what Linux was. Open source Java is as important -- if not more so -- than all of the Linux buzz combined.
- To still control the Java agenda in terms of the official language specification while energizing the base to speed up the development of, and to expand the availability of faster JVMs, support for cutting edge devices and peripherals, and faster development for new devices, better graphics, etc.
- To take some of the shine off of Microsoft's Vista and put it back onto the idea of perfectly mobile software and on-the-go computing which Sun has always touted.

The bottom line for consumers of technology is that by mid- to late-2007, when all of Sun's Java technologies become available, we'll see a surge in the number of Java-enabled devices, and those devices will present users with richer and more capable experiences than ever before. Given how fast both consumers and business are adopting the idea that computing is truly a ubiquitous experience, this is a win-win, for both Sun as a company and all of us.

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So, mr java fan, what exactly do YOU know about either Java or the GPL..? Name even one statement the author made that was inaccurate...

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commented on Nov 17, 2006 1:02:14 PM

David, you obviously have no idea about java and GPL. Thanks for writing this "article" anyway.

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