

# Shame on you, Scott

## The Failure of Customer Service at Sun

**The Shock** On January 8th, 2002, Sun caused an uproar in the Solaris user community by announcing, in the online trade press, the indefinite delay of the Solaris 9 x86 product. Disregarding its established practice of providing at least one notice in an official end-of-life statement and failing to contact customers directly, Sun betrayed the community which has long supported the company and advocated its products.

**Salt into the wound** On February 7th, Sun threw salt into the user communities wounds by announcing plans to expand its Cobalt line of Linux entry level servers while failing to address the complaints. Sun did not adequately explain to customers why it was departing from its long-time single Solaris solution, and to stockholders how it was going to profit in the already crowded, low margin, Linux/x86 market.

**Sun Strengths** Sun has carved out a technical leadership position in high availability, high reliability, stable online computer systems which are based on the Solaris OS (Operating System) and built upon Sun supplied hardware platforms. Upward compatibility is one of the company's strong points. An application developed on Sun SPARC systems acquired years ago, will still run on current hardware. Sun was one of the first companies to realize the importance of networked computer systems and the importance of system availability and reliability to the user community. The evolving product line protected the customer's investment in Sun hardware and software while providing scalable and predictable performance. The Solaris based

systems became widely deployed and rapidly became the industry standard for online customer-facing application deployment.

**Solaris x86** Sun also began to offer its users a version of Solaris that would execute on commodity Intel x86 hardware (PCs). Solaris x86 is particularly useful to a developer wishing to learn and target the Solaris environment without the impediment of expensive SPARC based hardware. The user community quickly learned how to take advantage of Solaris x86 in ways the Sun never anticipated and how to capitalize on the strengths of "one platform" with a common developer and system administration "view".

**Suns User Community** include technically minded developers who wanted their applications

to run reliably. They flocked to Suns computer platforms. They recognized the technical strength of the Solaris OS and became loyal and passionate Sun advocates - ultimately providing Sun with over 3,000 ready to run applications developed over a long period of time.

**All is Not Well** Suns continued success, especially with its big ticket large systems and their associated large profit margins caused them to lose sight of their mainstream user community who still accounted for the majority of sales - but perhaps not for

the majority of high margin profits. In turn they took the developer community for granted. An increasingly top heavy, bureaucratic and autocratic management lost touch with their user community. As management faltered the decision making processes became increasingly introspective and allowed the events of Jan. 8th to occur.

**The Failure** A total disconnect with the Solaris x86 user community. A complete betrayal of trust. A major upset for users whose strategic business decisions were based on the expected release of Solaris 9 in sync with the SPARC based product (as they had historically done).

**Resolution will require the following four steps:**

**Honest apology** Scott has not apologized and taken responsibility for the sudden and without warning announcement in the trade press, that it had ceased plans to ship the eagerly awaited Solaris version 9 for the x86 architecture alongside the SPARC release in

May. Scott has not admitted that Sun mismanaged the Solaris x86 product line and under utilized it both within and outside his organization while failing to capitalize on it as a strategic competitive weapon.

**Expression of empathy** Scott has failed to demonstrate that he understands his customers. He appears to not appreciate how

emotionally attached the community is to his company and the fantastic technologies it has produced over the last twenty years. Nor does he appear to recognize the user community's deep sense of betrayal.

**Commitment** to learn and not repeat mistakes. During a recent Q/A with the trade press, Scott said: "when we make a mistake, we admit it, we change it, we fix it, and don't make it again." Scott has yet to detail what lessons he has learned from this Solaris x86 debacle. The community has identified numerous areas in need of improvement and made many sincere practical suggestions, yet we feel ignored.

**Redress** Beyond resolving the core of our complaint by quickly making Solaris 9 x86 available as commercial product, if Scott truly wants to repair his relationship with his community, he should offer us even a modest expression of good will.

### Open Challenge to Scott McNealy

A challenge is being made to Scott McNealy to meet face-to-face with members of the Save Solaris Organization and the Technical Press in an open, public forum. Mr. McNealy is being challenged to support his company's actions and subsequent decision making with respect to a large community of Sun customers. Mr. McNealy has earned a reputation for flamboyantly berating his competition. His loyal customers have earned the opportunity for an open forum.

[www.Save-Solaris-x86.org](http://www.Save-Solaris-x86.org)

Save Solaris X86  
John Groenveld 814-863-9896  
john.groenveld@save-solaris-x86.org