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Wednesday, 15 January, 2003

Lack of awareness holds back Linux

by [Matthew Southwell](#)

Despite the millions of dollars invested in open source software by the likes of IBM, Linux remains under-utilised in today's computing environments. This is particularly true in the Middle East, where the bulk of Linux user groups (LUGs) remain dormant and projects such as Saudi Aramco's Linux cluster remain the exception rather than the rule. According to volunteer based Arabic Linux development group, Arabeyes, this is primarily due to a lack of awareness regarding open source software.

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"Eventually there will be a demand for Linux, but it is a question of educating people and getting the word out there. People only really get convinced [about Linux] when they see it in action and that is one thing that is seriously lacking here in the Middle East," says Nadim Shaikli, one of Arabeyes' management team.

"Universities, governments, end users and the man on the street has to realise that there is an alternative to Microsoft. Due to the political situation at the minute a lot of people in the local market do not like using American products, but they think there is no other option. There is, but they just don't realise it. It is this mindset that has to change," he adds.

Elsewhere in the world, Linux enters many users thinking at an early age, as it is included in university computer courses and forms the basis of many software projects. However, Shaikli says this is not happening in the Middle East, as professors are unwilling to invest the extra time needed to teach the topic.

"Arabeyes spent some time generating a list of university professors and contacted around 150 throughout the Middle East. Only three responded and of those only one was interested in establishing a dialogue to help educate the students in the benefits of Linux... We have even spoken to students who have gone in to see their professors, who in turn have spoken to department heads, and they have come back and said that this is beyond their mandate," he explains.

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