A new future for eComStation

At this moment, things don't look good for our beloved operating system. "They don't?" you ask? We have the eComStation 1.2 media refresh, there's an alpha for eComStation 2.0, there are things on the way like ACPI and bootable JFS on the way ... eComStation is easily the best OS/2 ever, and still getting better!

But, there are also some issues we can't ignore. The main issue is probably this: near the end of this month, IBM will stop selling OS/2, and end next year Big Blue will stop supporting it. Let's be fair: how much truly new stuff has come from IBM for OS/2 lately? There are updates to some device drivers, and the kernel is being maintained. But that too will stop.

Most likely, IBM will never be able to release the source code of OS/2. So we'll be stuck with limitations of the current code. A few examples:
Real Unicode (something different than code pages, really important to for instance the far east, a large growing market) isn't available.
Exchange with other people who use different systems or platforms currently is quite hard, and it seems to become harder over time.
No real support for multiple users on the same system. Or, if this comes available, no real security to separate users and roles.
Known problems with for instance the WPS will never be solved.
A maximum of 4 GB of memory. At this time, this seems to be enough, but Moore's law indicates a doubling every one and a half year. We will hit this boundary.
64 bit processors. The kernel has been changed so it can run (in 32 bit mode) on current 64 bit processors. However, this gives no guarantee that it will run on future processors.
We can simply use our current hardware. That's fine, until it breaks and one can't buy it any more.
In other words: at the moment things are quite well, but the future is unsure. That's why it would be good to think about that now.

Some people have thought about that for some time now. People who are closely involved at the development of the current eComStation product and other software. At Warpstock Europe 2005, Adrian Gschwend from netlabs.org has presented the ideas under the name "project Voyager". These are some of the concepts:
Try to keep those things of OS/2 that we love so much: the WPS, the object oriented desktop, REXX, etc.
Don't spend time and energy into creating things that are available to us from other sources; don't start developing a new kernel. (Choose from existing kernels, like those from Apple, Linux, BeOS, etc.)
Use open standards, that are available on other standards, to maximize the possibilities to exchange. Some examples are UTF-8 (Unicode), Cairo, GTK+, qt.

These ideas have been discussed with Serenity Systems (Bob St.John) and the product manager of the current eComStation line (Bart van Leeuwen). It has been agreed that Adrian will focus on the new product while Bart will focus on the continuity of the current product line. Bob will guard both lines as he did with the current line. This way, the current line of eComStation will not be forgotten during development and the first version(s) of the new line.

Within the OS/2 community, there is a lot of knowledge. For instance, with xworkplace a large part of the WPS has been rewritten. In fact, it was being rewritten until the author couldn't continue due

to bugs, design issues, or lack of documentation of the current OS/2 implementation. With these new ideas (newer than most other platforms) and the choice for open standards (which are available elsewhere), we could even attract developers to work for Voyager, or to use technologies from other platforms.

Please note that all this is still in the planning phase. Lots of choices still have to be made, there isn't much built yet. It'll take at least about 3 years before something usable will be delivered by the project. Until then, we have the current eComStation 1.2R and the upcoming eComStation 2.0 (and maybe even more versions). If you want to support project Voyager at this point, you can do two things:

Follow eComStation 1.2 and 2.0 (and next versions). This way, you'll fill the time until project Voyager reaches its targets. Moreover, part of the revenues of the current eComStation line will be used to fund the new developments.

Sponsor netlabs.org, through sponsor units, available at Mensys.

Ultimate goal of project Voyager is to deliver an eComStation 3.0 (or maybe 4.0). This way, eComStation is the perfect way to migrate from OS/2 into the future.