

CHOOSING ENTERPRISE PLATFORM

Over the past few years a new word has appeared in the in the business lexicon “Linux”. Linux is the latest computer operating system (OS) that is challenging Microsoft for the desktop computer, in addition to, competing with other OS’s for Enterprise Server dominance. Why should you be concerned? How can it affect you and your business?

Currently, Microsoft (MS) operation systems are on about 90+% of the world desktop computers. On the fringes of this market are OS’s like Macintosh and Linux. Macintosh (Manufactured by Apple Computers) is the most widely used OS in the art world, unfortunately, there are very few business users using it outside the art industries.

Linux on the other hand has been gaining influence in the business and government arena’s. Linux which was originally released in 1991, has been written mostly by an army of volunteer programmers. They have written an extensive OS that can run on the same type of computers the MS Windows runs on (PC’s).

Linux first had its fans among the academic and technical “geeks” users. This is because it had the look and feel of the OS they were using in their labs, it was able to run on old PC’s, it was free, and most importantly they could change the OS code to fit their needs. During the first rebellions against MS, around the same time as the Internet Browser War, Linux started making headlines as the OS alternative to Windows.

However, being just a fringe OS, Linux was not easy to install and there were not many business software packages that ran on it. That soon started to change with the additional media focus. Along with the frantic growth of the Java programming language in the business community, which is promoted as “write once, run anywhere”, Linux was receiving support of giants in the computer industry, such as IBM, HP, Oracle and Dell.

This was followed by MS changing its corporate licensing agreements, requiring customers to upgrade their Windows OS and Office Suites every 5 years. This was to ensure that you continued to pay MS for the latest version, even if your current version meets your needs. This made Windows much more expensive for large companies and government agencies, and the revolt against MS continued.

On May 28, 2003, Munich’s city council (the Silicon Valley of Europe and the third largest German City) voted 50 to 30 to switch to Linux. This was a major blow to MS. MS lobbied hard for this contract and MS final bid had a much cheaper up-front cost than the Linux bid. They lowered their bid from \$36.6 million to \$23.7 million. Where IBM and SuSE Linux’s final bid was \$35.7 million.

One of reasons that the city council choose the higher bidder was mainly because Linux gave them greater flexibility on when and where to upgrade their OS and office suites, they believed they will save the city money in the long run. After Linux’s coup, MS CEO Steve Ballmer, released a company wide memo for a call to arms to defeat Linux. This memo also validated Linux’s as a mainstream OS when he said, “Linux is a serious competitor...”.

So why are businesses and governments choosing Linux over other OS’s? Let us start by comparing the Pro’s and Cons of Linux to Windows.



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	Linux	Windows	Comments
Easy to configure		X	Linux has made a great deal of headway on this issue, but they are not as advanced as Windows.
Overall configurability	X		Part of the licensing agreement for Linux requires vendors to allow its customers to download the source code to their application. Giving them the option to make their own change the OS code itself.
Cost to purchase	X		You can download the latest version of Linux for free
Business Application Support		X	MS has been around a lot longer and has greater application support.
Vendor Independence	X		With windows, you are completely dependent on MS and what they believe is best for the community. Where the community makes Linux decisions.
Community Support			MS has a very large following. However, many look warily on any vendor who wields so much unchecked power, and are looking for a way to be less dependent on any one company.
Support for open platform languages such as Java	X		MS sees the Java language as a threat. In fact, their response to Java was their own language called C#.
Stability	X	X	This issue is very debatable on which operating systems is stable. Both operating systems have made great progress on this issue.
Security	X		If you pay attention to new reports, MS is a very complex OS and its code is supported solely by 1 company. This makes the task of



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- 1) **Configurability** – even the Windows is much easier to configure, it does not give you a lot of the options that Linux provides. The code to the Linux OS is available for free as part of the GNU Open Source License (see www.linux.org of complete details). This gives more sophisticated users greater flexibility in make Linux work they want it to. Compared this to windows, can you imagine seeing MS making its code available for download? And, allowing its users to make whatever changes they wished to the code, for free. Neither can I.
 - 2) **Cost of Purchase** – you can download the base Linux OS for free. This by itself makes Linux much cheaper than Windows. Linux vendors make their money by providing services to Linux users.
 - 3) **Business Application Support** – This has been, and continues to be, Linux's Achilles' heel as far as Linux take over the business desktops. However, this is quickly changing. The most visible office suite available is Sun Microsystems' StarOffice. The package is a very versatile suite that will meet most everyday user's needs.
 - 4) **Vendor Independence** – One of the main purposes of the GNU Open Source License is to prevent any one company of cornering the Linux market.
 - 5) **Community Support** – Even though MS has a very large customer base, many people in the business community are weary about being dependent on one vendor. Many still remember when IBM ruled the computer industry with an iron fist. Additionally, MS has shown its own arrogance in the way they force decisions on its customers. Linux vendors, for the most part, do not have that type of power over their customers. Making keeping the customer happy much more important.
 - 6) **Support for open platform languages such as Java** –even though MS claims to support Java they have taking actions to make their clients to use a proprietary version of the language. This is not a new tactic of theirs; they have done that with other technologies over the years. Additionally, MS developed a language similar to Java called C#. However, C# is primarily used on MS Windows applications.
 - 7) **Stability** – I do not think that either OS can lay claim to being the most stable. Either OS, if configured correctly, is very stable.
 - 8) **Security** – Windows is less secure for three reasons: First, Windows is on more machines than any other OS, this makes it the most visible target. Second, the OS code is supported solely by MS. This makes the task of securing the code that much more daunting. Lastly, in all honesty, MS made Windows so simple to code for, the simplicity makes its OS more accessible to attack.

How do you determine if Linux is right for me?

There are other OS that you should consider when looking to purchasing your next server or if you are think about changing what runs on your desktops. In addition, your response to the following questions, and how much weight you to each issue the question raises will help you make the decision:

How concerned you about being dependent on a single vendor for critical applications?

How secure do you need your server?

How much traffic will the server have to handle?

Is the machine going to be a server or a desktop machine?

What is going to take to convert over to a Linux?

How many people are going to need to be trained on the new OS?

How inclined are your users to incremental change?

How important is support for open languages such as Java?

How important is easy configuration?



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