

Reseller of the Month - September - LinuxIT

LinuxIT Europe – integrating open source solutions

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Established in 1999, LinuxIT Europe is based in London and Bristol and has evolved into the most credible Linux system integrator and professional services provider in the UK, currently beginning its expansion into Europe.

Through strategic alliances with the Open Source and proprietary ISVs, LinuxIT consultants leverage their relationships to provide commercial strength solutions into the enterprise. Many of these services are delivered directly to enterprise customers but LinuxIT's offerings have also formed the backbone of a number of offerings from the best known names in IT, including Cable and Wireless, Dimension Data, HP, Dell and IBM.

"Your company is recognised as one of the leading solution providers in your industry"

Natalie Ayres, Group Director - Small, Medium Enterprises & Partners Group

Microsoft Limited

Solutions

LinuxIT Solutions encompass every component of network infrastructure that all organisations require. LinuxIT works with its partners to deliver mission critical solutions including;

- Safety and switching management for railway network operators worldwide.
- Telephone billing and call tracking for wireless phone operators.
- Thin client warehouse systems for Logistics and distribution companies.
- Infrastructure solutions for mission critical, high availability environments.

Training

Within the Linux training world, LinuxIT is driving standards. As one of the first companies to confirm their commitment as a Red Hat Advanced Partner, LinuxIT has taken the initiative to address the education needs in the market, and offers class room and on-site specialist Red Hat training courses.

The award winning training courses culminate in exams that qualify students as Red Hat Certified Engineers (RHCE), Technicians (RHCT) and Architects (RHCA). Red Hat training equips the trainee with the skills and competencies necessary to manage Linux servers for mission-critical commercial and business roles.

Using performance-based testing methods designed to prove competence at real world challenges, the Red Hat Certifications ensure long term success for individuals and organisations.

Cliff Brereton, OpenPower Sales Manager at IBM, said: “As an IBM Business Partner Leader for Linux, LinuxIT has made significant contributions in that area in recent years.”

Managed Services

LinuxIT's managed service is branded as VitalSigns24.

VitalSigns24 network monitoring and system management service ensures that your business critical IT infrastructure is available to meet the operational requirements of your business all day, every day.

VitalSigns24 monitors customers' systems and data-centers for everything from hardware resource usage through to application response times and threshold management. When LinuxIT detects anomalies or action points then they proactively act to ensure that the systems stay available and responsive.

VitalSigns24 not only provides pro-active problem solving, but offers the option of pre-emptive maintenance and management of customers' software. If this option is chosen, we apply patches for any software and applications, and also provide software upgrades when available. Software management can include management of test environments and regression testing to ensure that upgrades are applied with minimum disruption and with predictable results.

VitalSigns24 consolidates hardware maintenance, software support and systems management into one single resource, enabling customers to concentrate on their business.

Consultancy & Support

LinuxIT's consultancy services target areas where open source technology can improve a business' IT infrastructure. The company's technical experts have years of experience implementing enterprise solutions within organisations of all sizes and from all industries. Working to aggressive timelines, they successfully deploy solutions both directly to the customers and to the clients of established and successful IT solutions companies including Hewlett Packard, IBM and their partners.

Whether a client is looking to optimize existing investments into IT infrastructure, decrease costs, reduce security risks, or leverage the industry's latest technologies to create competitive advantage, LinuxIT's consulting process ensures success.

As an independent integrator and service provider, LinuxIT will recommend the solution that best suits the client's requirements, whether that is a purely Linux and open source based solutions, or a heterogeneous environment made up of Linux, Microsoft and other vendors' technologies.

LinuxIT promotes and advocates the choice that the advances in open source technology provide the users with. A number of factors are being considered when

making any software or hardware recommendation, for example existing environment, security requirements, development cycles, support offer, Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) etc. LinuxIT analyses those, and implements the most suitable solution to the customer in every case.

“LinuxIT offered a significant improvement on our old solution. Now that our data is centralized, it resides on secure systems that are easier to back up. That’s a huge plus for us. And when it’s being transmitted between branch offices, it’s completely safe in the VPN tunnel.” Liam Dasey, IT Manager, Expotel

At every stage of the IT business lifecycle LinuxIT provides fully certified, experienced and talented people. LinuxIT’s technical team has more than 70 years of experience combined, and has qualifications including a number of Red Hat Certified Engineers, Certified VMWare Professionals, Microsoft Certified Systems Engineers, SCO Master ACE Certifications, and LPI Level 1 and 2 certifications.

Case Study

One example of LinuxIT’s expertise in systems integration is that of Baylis Logistics, the UK’s leading food and grocery supply chain specialists.

Baylis Logistics is an established third-party distribution company operating a nationwide network of seven depots covering in total just under one million square feet of storage space. Baylis lorries move food, liquor and consumable goods to supermarkets across the country.

The company, which has about 200 operational staff, has experienced tremendous growth in recent years and currently has a turnover of exceeding £35million.

Baylis Logistics’ legacy IT environment was based on a number of discrete networks at each depot location with hardware and software duplicated across the seven warehouse facilities. At each depot, Windows PCs were used by operations staff to access the browser-based and telnet applications. When its aging Microsoft Windows and SCO Unix based IT infrastructure needed replacing, Baylis Logistics turned to LinuxIT to implement a new infrastructure based on a thin client architecture running Red Hat Enterprise Linux and centrally managed by Baylis Logistics’ own IT support team.

Redundant desktop hardware led to maintenance problems

Baylis’ IT infrastructure had comprised of separate, server-based networks at each of the seven sites. Each depot had one SCO Unix server delivering both its core Distribution and Fleet management applications and providing an interface to the company’s central MySQL database system, which was used to consolidate data from across the entire company.

From the end-user perspective, the desktop systems at Baylis Logistics comprised of Windows PCs. However, by 2005 the network of over 200 Windows PCs was not only reaching the end of its short life-span, but also exposing Baylis to very high maintenance costs and increasing risk of infection from viruses. With the PCs primarily used for browser-based and telnet applications and only some operations

staff also using email, the majority of users had little requirement for the feature rich desktop environment of over-specified PC hardware.

Restoring the balance between user requirements and the cost of maintaining the network of servers and client devices was a priority for Baylis.

Consultancy and Support from LinuxIT

Baylis invited IT systems integrator LinuxIT to perform a review of its IT infrastructure in light of the issues it had identified. LinuxIT offers a complete end-to-end solution, augmenting its hardware and software solutions with the professional services capabilities required to deliver a fully integrated solution. LinuxIT is also able to provide post installation support and training for clients.

LinuxIT proposed the implementation of a ‘thin client’ architecture using the Red Hat Enterprise Linux operating system. This thin client network running off a central server could be managed centrally by Baylis Logistics’ own IT support team. Using thin client architecture, all users’ applications, data and even the operating system are hosted on a central server, with access provided by a network of thin client graphics-based terminals. With no applications, data or conventional hardware pieces (hard-drive, disk-drive etc.) residing on the terminal, it is both physically and operationally “thin”, compared with the traditional desktop PC. Consequently, thin client terminals also are significantly less expensive to purchase and have a much longer lifespan than a normal PC (10 years compared to an average of three years for a PC), in addition to being less vulnerable to malware attacks and consuming less power.

LinuxIT and Baylis selected HP hardware based on the powerful 64-bit architecture for the server and a combination of HP and Wise hardware for the thin client terminals. The 64-bit processors also enable the servers to achieve a better application performance.

Red Hat Enterprise Linux was selected for its greater value and business benefits through reduced hardware and operating system costs, whilst it leverages the performance of Industry Standard Server 64 bit computing technology

LinuxIT recommended using Red Hat Enterprise Linux as the operating system for the thin client architecture for a number of additional reasons. The Red Hat based thin client solution is highly customisable, and much more cost-effective than available alternatives. One of the advantages of the server-based architecture was that Baylis Logistics only needed to purchase a server license, with no additional licenses required for the client terminals. Several of the core applications used by Baylis Logistics had already been migrated to Linux, and a certain level of Linux expertise was available within the company, which assisted migration to the new system.

“Just by switching to the new hardware architecture we immediately saved approximately £9000 at each location, as the thin terminals cost £150 each compared to around £500 for PCs running Windows. These are instant TCO savings before even going live,” said David Kenning, IT Manager at Baylis Logistics. “The other huge savings are of course the reduced number of licenses we had to purchase by

going with Red Hat Enterprise Linux as each session run on the terminals boots from the server, so we only had to spend on the server operating system subscriptions,” added Kenning.

Without any data residing on the user terminals, the system benefits both in terms of security and setup costs. When a terminal is disconnected from the server it becomes useless to a thief, and contains no company or personal data. If a terminal becomes faulty, it can very quickly be replaced with another terminal because no time is spent installing software or transferring settings. Another advantage of this user-agnostic environment is that it frees staff from a fixed desk as they can have the same user experience at any terminal on to which they logon.

Baylis Logistics is now running two servers at each warehouse location, one running the Chess management software and the other hosting the thin client sessions. The servers have failover capability, as they can manage both tasks if one is offline. The servers host all data and processes for the thin client users, running applications such as terminal emulation, Open Office, web-mail and a browser for web based applications. The servers also connect to the central, Red Hat Enterprise Linux powered, MySQL database, which is accessible to both staff and clients through an Apache web server.

“Other benefits we are already realising and expect to continue in the long run are the reduced resources we have to invest in maintenance, support and security because of the simple fact that Linux is more reliable and secure. This will have a major influence on our business continuity strategy. The combined thin client solution and Red Hat Enterprise Linux from LinuxIT has not only enabled us to make considerable savings on software licences, but also made staff more motivated and satisfied because their computer systems are just so much faster and more reliable. Our IT support calls from operational staff literally dropped to zero. What’s more, the new failover server eliminates the need for tape back-up or the need to reboot the server just because we think it’s safer to do so. We no longer need to stop all systems just to back-up our data,” commented Kenning.

As multiple applications can be remotely hosted, a significantly lower number of terminals are now required, which in turn has led to reduced administration and acquisition costs. Baylis Logistics was able to reduce the number of terminals it uses from 200 to 140 by consolidating several tasks which normally ran on a number of PCs on to a single terminal. Because all the software is now hosted centrally, the IT support team can more effectively manage maintenance and support tasks, so much so that two IT support staff could be re-distributed to other roles.