

By Jack Wallen

Your systems are all way overdue for an operating system upgrade, but your IT department is going over budget. You know you can't afford the latest version of Microsoft Windows or Office. The easiest path to reining in your costs would be to migrate over to the Linux operating system. Unfortunately, corporate headquarters isn't convinced that Linux is the way to go. How do you convince them otherwise? Simple. Use these 10 compelling points to persuade them that Linux is right for your organization.

## 1 TCO is bunk

Think about this: How many times have you had to work longer than you thought you would to solve a problem—be it on a Windows server, a desktop, or solving a security issue? Certain jobs just have to be done, and those jobs don't care how much time you spend on them, because your network or your users depend upon it. Same thing with Linux. Most surveys and studies claim that the money you're going to spend training IT staff to administer Linux would equal or better the cost of using Windows. As Colonel Potter would say, "Bull Feathers!"

Most companies aren't going to spend money training IT staff these days. Most companies are going to say "Figure it out!" and it's on your dime to do so. That might mean down time at work, lunch time, or over time. But the initial TCO of using Linux is the same as the initial TCO of using a new version of Windows. The good news is, once Linux is up and running, you won't be wasting precious time fixing, patching, or solving security issues. Add to that Linux' ability to resurrect old hardware and you can see how Linux can easily save money on every level.

## 2 Linux is not just for servers

For the longest time, most IT pros were convinced that the only place for Linux in the corporate world was in the server room. That was then, this is now. The Linux desktop has improved by leaps and bounds in the last five years. And when people see it in action, they quickly change their minds.

One thing about the Linux desktop that perfectly suits the corporate world is its flexibility. The Linux desktop can be made to look and act exactly how you want it to. It can even be made to look and act just like Windows (in most of its incarnations). So you have the familiarity for the users and the security and reliability to put most IT staff at ease. On top of that, there are so many alternatives to the "big two" of KDE and Gnome that the possibilities are endless.

The Linux desktop isn't just at home on the workstation, either. A Blackbox or Enlightenment desktop makes a perfect kiosk station where very few menu entries (or icons) can be added so users are limited in what they can start up. Another good selling point is that many of the Linux desktops are rock solid and won't waste employee time crashing or locking up. Just try getting Blackbox (or Fluxbox) to crash or freeze.

## 3 Security is the name of the game

Let's face it, Linux simply doesn't have the security issues that Windows suffers from. Many people claim that the lack of viruses, worms, Trojans, and hacks is due to the lack of popularity. Those same detractors claim that once Linux reaches a certain saturation level, the viruses and such will come. Well, Linux is here (and has been for a while) and still no viruses have overtaken the OS. So it's safe to say that for now (and probably the short and long term), the Linux operating system—used either on server or desktop deployments—is safe from nefarious executables and code.

One of the best arguments you can give corporate HQ is that while all the Windows users are taken down from viruses, the Linux users will just keep plugging away. This exact thing has happened to me. While I was working at TechRepublic (around 2001), the entire staff was unable to work due to a virus. I, on the other hand, was plugging away. Why? Because my machine was running Red Hat, so I was immune to the Love Bug virus that brought down the company. While everyone was out in the halls unsure about what to do, I was completing my tasks so I could head home at the normal time. I shudder to think how much that particular virus cost businesses and how many of those businesses would have been saved had they been using Linux.

## 4 Support is everywhere

Stay with me here. I know that most argue that Linux support is the biggest problem. However, I would argue that Windows support pales in comparison to the support you can find for Linux. Have you ever called for Windows support? Not only are you paying for every call (either with a paid plan or per instance), but you are also having to deal with support help most likely reading from a script. You may get your problem solved (on your dime) or you may not.

By contrast, Linux-style support offers various avenues to follow. Sometimes those avenues will lead you straight to the developer of the application (which has happened to me on a number of occasions.) You can obtain paid support via a company like Red Hat or Novell, or you can use mailing lists, forums, direct contact with developers, gurus, Google... you name it. And typically, as in the case with mailing lists like the [Fedora list](http://www.redhat.com/mailman/listinfo/fedora-list) (<http://www.redhat.com/mailman/listinfo/fedora-list>) or the [Ubuntu list](https://lists.ubuntu.com/) (<https://lists.ubuntu.com/>), you get pretty immediate responses. You can also go the IRC path. There are plenty of chat rooms where Linux uber nerds hang out. There, you can generally find someone to help you out. It's fast, it's free, and it's reliable. And when you have multiple support options, the chances of solving a problem efficiently are far greater than picking up the phone and hoping that the support technician's script includes your problem.

## 5 Applications are key

The standard argument is that Linux doesn't have enough applications. Untrue. Doing a search for "Linux" on [Freshmeat](http://www.freshmeat.net) ([www.freshmeat.net](http://www.freshmeat.net)) reveals 11,578 results and on [Sourceforge](http://www.sourceforge.net) ([www.sourceforge.net](http://www.sourceforge.net)), it reveals 8,345 results. And the Photoshop argument? The average Photoshop user can do everything he or she needs with [The GIMP](http://www.gimp.org) ([www.gimp.org](http://www.gimp.org)). Microsoft Office users? Meet [OpenOffice](http://www.openoffice.com) ([www.openoffice.com](http://www.openoffice.com)). Sure, there might be some proprietary application created specifically for your company—and for that, we have [WINE](http://www.winehq.com) ([www.winehq.com](http://www.winehq.com)), which can run most any Windows application.

But the best thing about Linux applications is that they're open source. If there's something about the application that doesn't suit your needs, you can change it. If you have the developers in house, more than likely they can adapt an application to do something perfectly suited for your company. Imagine taking a free application and reworking it so that it's exactly the application you need (down to the look and feel).

## 6 The kernel is just for you

Even though most people don't roll their own kernels any more, you can. One of the nicest aspects of the Linux kernel is that you can re-roll it to fit your exact needs and hardware. This provides any number of benefits. For one, re-rolling a kernel to fit your system precisely means your machine will work more efficiently. You don't need wireless rolled into a kernel? Take it out. One less security issue.

## 7 Virtualization is virtually everything

With the help of such applications as [VMware](http://www.vmware.com) ([www.vmware.com](http://www.vmware.com)), you can run a virtual machine within a machine. This makes for perfect test beds for practically anything. You can run sandbox Web sites or applications. You can do test runs of deployments, saving you countless hours and money. And unlike the Windows world, Linux virtualization is free. Applications like [Xen](http://xen.xensource.com/) (<http://xen.xensource.com/>) are available at no cost and can do clustering as well as virtualization. Virtualization is also a great means of training employees on new systems or software. With employees training on a virtual operating system, the cost of disaster is far less than if they were training on a production machine.

## 8 Updating is simple and fast

When a problem arises on a Linux system, the problem is fixed very quickly and released into the wild. Whereas with Microsoft, you could be waiting weeks or months for that crucial update. And with the newer front-ends for package management, installing and updating software is as simple as point and click. Not only are you saving your company from being vulnerable to an exploit far faster than if you were using Windows, the update is quick and easy.

## 9 Administration is world wide

Imagine you are on vacation and you get a call from your boss saying the Web site is down. True, if you have a Windows server there are ways to administer it remotely. But you are limited to remote administration with the tools Microsoft offers. With Linux, you can remotely administer in so many ways. One of my favorites is using secure shell. I have administered Linux servers via secure shell from a Palm Treo 680. Or you can tunnel X through ssh to administer via GUI. So as long as you have Internet access, you can administer your Linux machine—and do so without adding third-party software. If you're concerned about security, set up ssh to accept only certificate logins (and disable root login as well.)

## 10 Linux is constantly gaining traction

*Information Week* recently published findings indicating that nearly 70% of 420 polled business-technology professionals are using Linux. Compare that to just one year ago, when that percentage was 56%. A 14% jump in use in a single year is nothing to sneeze at. And with more people using Linux, the incompatibility issue is fading away into the distant past. Consider that companies like Wal-mart are selling dirt-cheap desktop systems with Linux pre-installed, and you can draw the same conclusion: The only place Linux is going is up.

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## Version history

**Version:** 1.0

**Published:** April 21, 2008

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