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Linux ensnares another European city

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Bergen, Norway, has opted to replace Windows and Unix machines with Linux on servers for its schools and city databases and could later put the open-source operating system on desktop machines.

The city chose Linux because it costs less, improves reliability and doesn't lock the government into purchasing one company's products, city Chief Technology Officer Ole-Bjorn Tuftedal said in an interview.

"We want great freedom from being tied to one vendor, to make the competition work better," Tuftedal said. "And it simplifies running things, if you don't need to support too many different operating systems."

Servers--networked machines to handle tasks such as e-mail delivery, Web site hosting and bank account transactions--are an established market for Linux. A forecast from market researcher IDC released Wednesday projected that of the \$60.8 billion to be spent on servers in 2008, **\$9.7 billion will go to Linux servers** and \$22.7 billion to Windows servers.

Bergen has two components to its Linux switch, both employing SuSE Linux from Novell, Tuftedal said. In one, the city is replacing 100 Windows servers spread among its schools with 20 IBM blade servers in two centrally located **BladeCenter** chassis. In the other, Bergen is replacing between 20 and 30 Unix servers from several manufacturers with six Hewlett-Packard dual-processor Itanium servers.

Bergen, the home city of composer Edvard Grieg, opted for Novell's SuSE Linux over Red Hat for technological reasons, Tuftedal said. "We consider SuSE being ahead of Red Hat technically," with earlier 64-bit versions, better support for multiple languages and a focus on the **KDE** graphical interface.

Bergen's move comes on the heels of other **governmental adoption of Linux**, including **Munich, Germany**; **Austin, Texas**; and Korea. **Paris** is evaluating Linux, while Massachusetts adopted a policy of **preference for open-source software**, later modified to emphasize products of "best value."

"Governments are interested in Linux and open source, because they prefer open standards over de facto standards. Also, governments prefer open file formats and transparency," Stacey Quandt of Quandt Analytics said.

In the United States, though, things have moved slower. "While open source is used by the Department of Defense, the U.S. Census Bureau and regional governments such as Jefferson county in Colorado, the significant entrenchment of Microsoft and the desire to boost U.S. companies can be an impediment to open-source adoption," Quandt said.

But Linux is making inroads in North America, too. Chicago's Business and Information Services Department ran a pilot project with Red Hat's Linux and Oracle's database software on **Hewlett-Packard ProLiant servers**; now the city is moving its vehicle registration system from mainframes to **Red Hat Enterprise Linux**.

There are voices of caution, though. The **Initiative for Software Choice**, a lobbying and advocacy group, strongly opposes cases in which governments mandate use of or preference for open-source software. "We applaud any market-based response," spokesman Michael Wendy said of Bergen's decision. "We feel better when they made the decision with all the available choices. It certainly beats having a law that removes two-thirds of the landscape off the bat and shortens choices, as a preference law would do."

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The Initiative for Software Choice, part of the larger Computing Technology Industry Association, has active participation from members such as Microsoft, Intel, EDS and the [German Software Association](#), Wendy said.

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Tuftedal said he didn't consider Windows for the database servers chiefly because of issues of security, reliability and ease of management.

"I really find Windows not to be very suitable for that kind of core task, where you really need it to be dead stable and secure," he said. "We can reboot our terminal servers every night, but you'd rather not do that with (database) servers."


And for servers, the costs of software licenses and support is about half for Linux than for Windows, he added.

For now, Bergen decided to keep Windows 2000 for the PCs used by its 32,000 students, chiefly because teachers use a separate network of Windows machines, and the city didn't want to have to force teachers to deal with two types of computers, he said.

But that could change.

"We did last year do a Linux desktop test, which was successful, and the pupils liked it very much. We also found it more stable and less prone to be hacked by the pupils," Tuftedal said. Another test is planned next year to look at alternatives that won't complicate teachers' daily work, he said.

Cost is one reason for switching to Linux on desktop machines, also called clients. "Changing the clients could probably pay for itself by the end of the first year," he said.

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