

Munich's Choice Doesn't Prove Linux OK for General Desktop Use

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The city council of Munich, Germany, has announced it will move its desktop clients to Linux. But deployment won't start until 2004, and many challenges lie ahead.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 28 May 2003, the city of Munich, Germany, voted to migrate its Windows desktops to Linux.

Analysis

Although the Munich city council has voted to migrate its IT infrastructure to Linux, the actual migration won't start until 1Q04. If the migration succeeds, Munich's 14,000 clients would visibly boost Linux on the desktop. However, the city hasn't completed detailed planning for the migration, so don't view this announcement as proof that desktop Linux is ready for the general-purpose knowledge worker.

Munich hasn't yet disclosed the business case behind its decision. Gartner understands that Munich has many older versions of Windows installed, including Windows 3.1. We believe enterprises with very old infrastructures can cost-justify this type of migration more easily.

Gartner estimates that Munich's migration to Linux will cost around 30 million euros. It would have cost 27 million euros to upgrade Windows, before some reportedly very steep discounts from Microsoft. The business case assumes that many applications will not migrate to Linux; instead, the bulk of applications requiring Windows will probably be Web-enabled and accessed through a browser. Munich will accommodate any remaining applications using virtual machine software, such as VMware. Too many VMware implementations or other workarounds will reduce the benefits of the Linux migration, and the residual reliance on Windows would likely be higher than planned. The planned implementation is reportedly a traditional fat-client architecture.

The state of the project by year-end 2005 will better indicate Linux's maturity for the desktop and for knowledge workers in particular. If your enterprise is considering Linux, make sure that the expected benefits of migration will exceed the costs. Also, governments may take additional external factors into account in making this kind of decision — factors like local job creation or increasing local competition — that may not be relevant to your enterprise.

Analytical Sources: Michael Silver and Nikos Drakos, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Myths of Linux on the Desktop" — Evaluate all of the software in your stack and consider how running alternatives on Windows and Linux may change your costs. **By Michael Silver**
- "Open-Source Software Running for Public Office" — Government attitudes spur interest in open-source software. **By Nikos Drakos, Robin Simpson and Andrea Di Maio**

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