

## Choose Users Carefully for Novell's Improved Linux Client

Michael A. Silver

Novell's new client operating system has an improved user interface and features. But companies will still need to be selective about identifying the appropriate users for it.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

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### Event

On 22 March 2006, Novell demonstrated the next version of its Linux client operating system (OS), SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop 10 (SLED 10). Novell plans to ship this version during 3Q06.

### Analysis

Novell's demonstration coincidentally occurred the day after Microsoft announced a delay in the shipment of Windows Vista (see "Vista Slip, Enterprise Testing, Make 2007 Deployment Unlikely"). Although this OS is much improved over previous versions, the cost of migrating Windows applications remains the main barrier to widespread enterprise adoption. Nevertheless, the OS will have many new features which enterprises are likely to find attractive, including:

- Integrated desktop search
- Popular virtual private network (VPN) clients
- OpenOffice.org 2.0.2, improved by Novell with licensed fonts and Visual Basic for Applications macro conversion (Novell will also ship a Windows version.)
- Improved plug and play for Universal Serial Bus and Bluetooth devices

The most visible change in SLED 10 is a new user interface (UI), which is similar to the Macintosh as well as to the UI that will be included in Windows Vista. Compared with the new UI, previous Linux UIs felt "grafted on." Included in the new UI are live icons during task switching, improved window animation, transparent frames and multiple desktops that make the screen appear like a 3-D cube when switching between them. To get the most from the new UI features, Novell recommends, at minimum, a 915 chip set. Windows Vista's graphics requirements are reportedly heavier for its more advanced features, although Windows Vista likely will include features that are not offered by Novell in SLED 10.

SLED 10 is a positive step in the evolution of desktop Linux. However, it still won't run Windows applications, which means that migration costs will be high for users who require access to many Windows applications.

### Recommendations

- Consider SLED 10 for users who have very limited Windows compatibility needs; Linux will still likely not be suitable for all users. If you choose SLED 10, be prepared to classify users and support more desktop diversity.
- Factor in Novell's annual maintenance fee for access to security fixes for any business cases you develop.
- Expect Novell's version of OpenOffice.org to be suitable for more users. But it's too early to determine its level of compatibility and fidelity with enterprise Excel applications and complex Word documents.

**Analytical Source:** Michael Silver, Gartner Research

### Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "The Myths About Desktop Linux Persist" — Look past the hype about Linux to gain a more realistic understanding of the benefits of this OS. **By Michael Silver**
- "Examining Where Linux and Open-Source Office Products Make Sense" — Open-source office products make sense for some users in some organizations, but rarely for all users in any organization. **By Michael Silver**

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