

# Red Hat scores another Linux victory

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Red Hat has announced several large European Linux installations, including a deal to implement more than 8,000 desktops for a major German insurance company.

The deal with LVM Versicherungen, announced on Monday, is one of the biggest successes so far for desktop Linux. The City of Munich's decision in May 2003 to switch 14,000 machines from Windows to Linux is still the most significant migration, but it remains at the planning stage. Red Hat said BPU Banca, Italy's seventh-largest banking group, will migrate 8,000 Unix clients to Linux; and Statoil, Norway's largest oil company, has migrated its IT environment from Unix to Linux.

LVM said it is replacing 8,500 custom-built Linux desktops with Red Hat systems because management and development of the custom systems had grown too complicated. In recent years, Red Hat and other major Linux distributors, such as Novell's Suse Linux and MandrakeSoft, have increasingly focussed on enterprise-grade management systems such as Red Hat Network as their main selling point.

The systems involved account for all of LVM's desktops, except for a small number of Windows machines needed to run certain specialised applications, LVM said. The clients will run a mail client, image viewer, Web browser, LVM's own Java-based application suite and, in some cases, Windows applications via terminal services. "These are the people who earn the money, they are our face to the customer," said Matthias Strelow, project leader for LVM's IT infrastructure.

Strelow said a Windows roll-out would have been unthinkable, partly because of the complexity of managing updates and patches.

LVM's situation is unusual in that it decided from the beginning to avoid dependency on Windows clients - the company replaced its green-screen terminals with IBM network computers in 1998, and when IBM stopped development on the systems in 2000, the company opted for pared-down Linux clients built from scratch. In fact, the company built its system guided by a book called *Linux From Scratch*, which provides instructions on building Linux systems from the kernel on up, and allows users to build installations as small as 100MB.

"Standard distributions were too big, and too complex for what we wanted to do," said Strelow. "We wanted a Linux that would do exactly the samethings as our network stations had."

Over time, as the company's needs grew, it greatly expanded the desktops, relying on its own resources and on the maintainers of individual open-source projects. "We would sometimes get a new feature in the window manager after five working days," Strelow said. "I can't imagine a proprietary software company doing it so fast."

LVM decided to go with an established distributor when its systems grew so complex that the company found itself doing too much development work. "We are an insurance company, and we found ourselves doing the work of a distributor," Strelow said. "It was difficult to stay up to date with security patches and software updates. It's OK to handle them with a slim system, but it's too much work if the system grows and grows in complexity."

BPU Banca is migrating all of its 8,000 Unix workstation clients to Red Hat Desktop, and is replacing Sun hardware with Intel, saving in total about 50 percent on hardware and software cost, Red Hat said. The company moved to Linux to gain vendor independence, BPU Banca said.

Statoil's migration is largely about simplifying a complex infrastructure that had been based on seven different versions of Unix as well as Windows, Red Hat said. After a two-stage migration the company will be running only Red Hat Linux and Windows, reducing its administration costs, Statoil said.

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