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Linux lands big bank account

By Peter Williams [29-11-2002]

European IT operations ditch Windows to cut costs



The European arm of Banco do Brasil, the largest bank in South America, is switching from Windows to Linux to cut costs and centralise support.

The bank will consolidate 41 Windows NT servers in eight European branches down to three IBM iSeries servers in London with six remote IBM xSeries Intel servers.

The long-term strategy is to phase out Windows completely. Linux is also being used to replace Windows on desktops.

"We had about 70,000 Windows server and desktop licences and eight NT networks serving Europe," said Tim Evans, UK IT manager at Banco do Brasil.

"This gave us a lot of problems. So our objective was to centralise IT support to become more cost-effective and flexible," he added.

In addition to cost savings, Evans said the bank had already achieved a more effective and reliable IT service. Productivity had increased and fewer contracts meant less administration.

In the future, he said, the bank hoped staff would converge to a single skill-set.

The core Windows-based banking application has been rewritten in Java to make it available on any system, including over the web. One iSeries 820 server now runs the entire European operation from London, substantially reducing administration and licence costs.

"Linux runs Java much quicker than Windows. It's the natural operating system to run Java," said Evans, who added that other applications are now gradually being ported to Linux.

The bank is using the multiple-partitions capabilities of IBM's iSeries, which will also connect an xSeries Windows system as if it were another partition.

Banco do Brasil has gone further by consolidating several Windows NT servers onto a single IBM x440, using VMWare to create virtual Windows machines.

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An iSeries 820 server consolidates all the European networks into one, linking the six xSeries servers, providing a storage area network (SAN) and file and print services.

Open source Samba handles file and print services and manages existing remote Windows desktops on Linux. Evans said Samba also performed better than Windows. Windows NT system security is set in Samba and passed to and from NT automatically.

A third iSeries server (a model 270) is used as a Lotus Domino server running mail for 250 staff throughout Europe. It also links into the bank's private intranet.

Banco do Brasil has 78,000 employees serving 12 million customers. It has 33 international branches in 21 countries outside Brazil. It has a central data processing centre in Brasilia employing 1,200 IT staff.

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