

## LINUX: From Scratch to Server

Linux has been the mainstay of the server world. It is an operating system that powers the world's busiest sites like Google and is also being increasingly embraced by enterprises and the Government. Furthermore, the host of vendors like IBM and HP supporting and promoting Linux strengthens the case that Linux is ready to be deployed on an enterprise-wide basis.

What is Linux? How can it be used? How much will it cost? Why do I need to change? These questions and many more need to be answered to make a convincing case for Linux.

Linux is an Open Source operating system developed by thousands of volunteer coders who were motivated primarily to create a better operating system because they were not satisfied with the operating systems available at that time. This led to the development of the Linux kernel or the heart of the operating system. People get confused because there are many different types of Linux like Red Hat, SuSe, Mandrake, Ubuntu and many more. This makes the decision making for selecting a type of Linux confusing and difficult. However, all these types share the same kernel.

Linux, in our opinion, is useful as a server within the enterprise and it is difficult to envision that it will power desktops in the foreseeable future. The beauty of Linux is that it can co-exist within a Windows or a hybrid environment and can be used as a server in the following main ways.

- File server that can act as a shared network drive for users.
- Web server to host your external and internal web sites and applications.
- Email server which allows users to send, store and retrieve emails.
- Print server for sharing and printing via a network printer.
- Database server by installing RDBMS software like MySQL.
- Backup server for backup and restoration purposes.

Additionally, the Linux server can also be used as a FTP server, firewall and anti-virus server

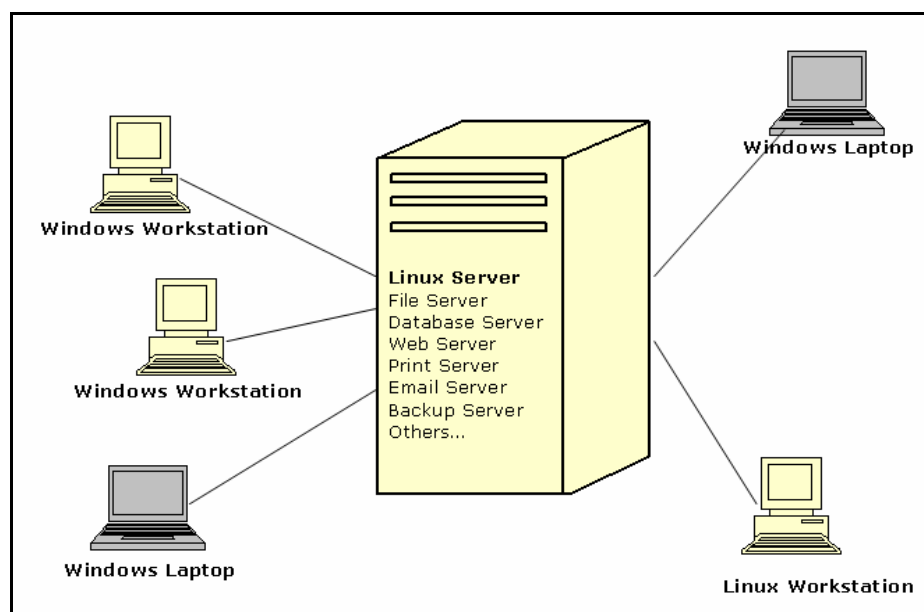


Figure 1: Linux as a server in a hybrid environment

Linux distributions are free but if you lack the technical expertise to install and configure then it is best to engage a vendor to support. There are also vendors like Net-iTech that provide complete turn-key versions of Linux-based server operating systems like NITIX. Generally, the Linux operating system neither has a license fee nor a 'number of users per server' restriction. Therefore, it is a cost-effective solution especially if you have a large number of users or if you expect that the scale of your operations will grow rapidly.

Apart from the cost factor, there are three other main benefits of Linux that make a convincing case to adopt Linux as a server.

Firstly, since only the server needs to be changed there is minimal disruption to the users because in most cases, no additional software needs to be installed on their desktops.

Secondly, Linux provides better reliability in terms of the performance.

Thirdly, Linux has better security as there are very few viruses and malicious software that is designed to attack Linux systems.

It is important to weigh the cost and benefit before adopting Linux as a server. However, in the long term we believe that Linux is a better solution mainly because of its affordability, reliability, security and scalability.

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*Dipankar has in-depth knowledge of strategic integration of web technologies into a business. He has system analysis and design experience and is well-versed with various software applications, programming languages and system design methodologies with a keen interest in Open Source technologies. He has led many Bizibody projects like RATIO, CaseTracker, Law Society Portal and the LAWNET content management system using Open Source as well as proprietary platforms.*

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