

Choosing a Server Upgrade

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Choosing a server upgrade for your SMB

Michael Gregg

When the support runs out on your aging servers, you'll need to decide what to upgrade to.

It's not uncommon to find small and medium-sized businesses that still run old Windows NT or 2000 servers. There are many reasons for not upgrading, but most likely it's due to cost. Businesses using these products must realize that product support will end soon. Windows NT Server will reach its final support deadline on Dec. 31, 2004, and Windows Server 2000 support ended on June 30, 2005. Operating both products beyond these dates will become increasingly difficult and could even jeopardize your day-to-day operations.

Once you decide to change, the question is: What should you change to? Common choices would be Windows 2003, Vista, Longhorn, or a Linux variant. Here's a look at some options:

- **Windows 2003:** If you choose Windows 2003, you probably already have a team that is ready to do the installation and implementation. Sure, there have been changes and security has been increased, but it's an update of previous products. Still, you might need new hardware for the install as well as the Windows 2003 server software, which costs approximately \$1,200 and includes 10 user licenses.
- **Linux:** Every year, more medium-sized companies are recognizing the advantages of Linux. Versions include Caldera Systems, Red Hat, SuSE and Turbolinux. While the software may be inexpensive or free, you may lack the in-house technical expertise for the installation, implementation or maintenance. Therefore, you'll have to bring in additional manpower or get your employees trained, which could easily cost \$5,000 per employee.
- **Nitix:** Don't give up just yet! Developed by Net Integration Technologies Inc., Nitix is a good, stripped-down, hardened version of Linux. It contains many of the features in a Windows server but at a lower cost. Not only is it user friendly, but it also comes with an impressive array of built-in technologies, including Web services, e-mail, DNS, DHCP, server-based antivirus, LDAP, firewall and more. The Small Business Nitix server software comes with five user licenses and costs approximately \$600.

If that is not enough, it can also be purchased with a preconfigured server. The server comes in three varieties: Micro (small office, 15 user maximum); Mark1 (medium office); and Mark2 (medium office, redundancy, backup and RAID). The Nitix Mark 1 has received outstanding reviews from some reputable technical publications.

Choosing the right server upgrade for your SMB is not an easy task. During the next few years, Microsoft will be increasingly challenged in this market category. These options may seem to make our jobs more difficult, but, in reality, they increase our ability to find cost-effective answers.

About the Author

Michael C. Gregg is the COO of Superior Solutions, Inc., a security assessment and training firm. His current responsibilities include performing security assessments and evaluations for corporate and government entities. He has served as the developer of high-level security classes, study guides, has taught classes for many Fortune 500 companies and contributed to many books, including the Sams publication, *Inside Network Security Assessment*.

