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Linux is emerging as a viable alternative operating system for businesses all over the world.

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By Zeid Nasser, Star Staff Writer

JORDAN (Star) - Linux is emerging as a viable alternative operating system for businesses all over the world. Recently, it's caught on in the Middle East with major universities in Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and other countries adopting Linux. Also in business, oil and gas companies in the Gulf, some banks and other companies are adopting it.

The Arabization of Linux will drive this growth. IBM recently finished Arabizing the major components required to run Linux on the client side and is also working on Arabic support for Motiff and X-term, the Word component of Open Office and the web browser, called Mozilla.

Among Linux fans there have also been Arabization efforts. A grass-root development group, called Arabeyes, has been developing Arabic support for KDE and users can already read/write in Arabic. So, apart from Arabization, what are the factors that make Linux attractive?

First, and the most important of all, is the fact that Linux is free and provides a 'legal' option to replace pirated software. Instead of paying the relatively high price for licensing Microsoft Windows, users can go to Linux.

This factor has a 'domino-effect', making every aspect of computing cheaper. The growth of Linux at the server level will drive more desktop adoption in companies, because its better to create low cost homogeneous environments that reduce support and training expenditure while improving performance. Arabized Linux at the desktop-level is going to be a serious alternative for businesses in the years to come, as the Business Software Alliance (BSA) steps up its fight against piracy in very country in the region.

A Linux specialist supported this logic saying that, "users may not be ready to use Linux in their homes yet but in the business world, where spending is the primary concern, Linux at the desktop level will reduce IT spending in the enterprise." Already, within universities, this has been the case. As cost reduction is necessary and since IT students are skilled 'open source' users Linux adoption has been successful and will continue to grow. Second, there is the issue of security. Linux is a more secure system, presently, for a number of reasons.

A Linux expert from IBM commented on this by saying, "With Microsoft there are a lot of security holes, which you cannot fix yourself. We don't claim that there are no security holes in Linux, but there are not so many. And because it is open source you are able to fix any problems yourself."

Also, as far as computer viruses are concerned, Linux is a more secure environment because there aren't any Linux viruses yet! What's more, everybody agrees that UNIX

systems are more stable, and more scalable system than any Windows operating systems. The fact that Linux is, basically, a UNIX system with a graphic user interface has made it more popular among IT managers and buyers.

To truly appreciate the potential of Linux and the speed with which it is being adopted, consider this fact: Linux now enjoys a 5 percent share of the business desktop market. That percentage equals Apple's business desktop share!

Maybe Linux will be the operating system to challenge Microsoft in ways that Apple was unable to for nearly two decades. Linux has been around for only five years and it's already making Microsoft sweat!

With IBM, Sun, Computer Associates and 'legions' of companies behind it, Linux will have to grow. Now with the United Linux initiative, made up of seven top Linux suppliers, more and more people will be considering it as a valid option.

Give Linux a try, you won't be disappointed.

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