

This New House

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Colorado home builder eliminates Web server downtime with SUSE Linux Enterprise Server and gets national attention from a TV home makeover show.

Keller Homes needed to dramatically improve the reliability and uptime of its mission-critical Web servers, particularly as it prepared to participate in the TV show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. With SUSE Linux Enterprise Server, the company eliminated downtime and was able to capture the full benefit of a tremendous national marketing opportunity.

> Overview

As an independent, private company, Keller Homes prides itself on being more nimble, more innovative, and more service-driven than other larger, corporately owned builders. In a recent survey, Keller ranked among the top ten builders nationwide in customer satisfaction. Keller Homes was founded in Colorado Springs in 1983. The company has over 55 professionals on staff and builds 100-200 homes each year.

> Challenge

Keller Homes has a variety of mission-critical Web sites, including its public Web site and an extranet used by nearly 200 vendors to track the materials, schedules and payments associated with customized home projects. Periodic downtime was frustrating for users and created business delays. The company was running its Web servers on both Microsoft IIS and Red Hat and wanted to consolidate to a single, more reliable operating system.

When Keller Homes was chosen as a builder for the television show, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, they learned that the increase in Web site hits following the show had crashed the Web servers of previous home builders. The company had two months to ensure that their Web servers could withstand an enormous increase in volume in order to capitalize on such a huge marketing opportunity.

> Solution

Keller Homes evaluated operating systems from Microsoft, Red Hat and Novell before selecting SUSE Linux Enterprise Server, recommended by Common Knowledge Technology, a Novell Gold partner.

"The Microsoft option was cost-prohibitive and we always had difficulty getting adequate support from Red Hat," said Luke Wignall, managing partner at Common Knowledge Technology. "SUSE Linux Enterprise Server is a more stable platform and provides a better return on investment. It also comes with Novell's enterprise Linux support."

Working with Common Knowledge Technology, Keller Homes moved its Web servers to SUSE Linux Enterprise Server running on existing Dell hardware. The IT team got

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Lance Hill
IT Manager
Keller Homes

the new Linux solution up and running in just a few days. The company consolidated its Web servers to just two physical Linux servers and plans to use Xen virtualization for further consolidation.

"The best part about SUSE Linux Enterprise Server is that it's maintenance free," said Lance Hill, IT manager at Keller Homes. "We have to remind ourselves to check the servers periodically because we never experience any downtime."

After Keller Homes participated on the *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* show, its Web servers received an exponential increase in activity, averaging 3,000 hits per hour at times with a peak of more than 6,000 hits in a single hour.

"In the days following the *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* show, our Web site performed flawlessly," said Hill. "The reliability of SUSE Linux Enterprise Server kept our site from going down and allowed us to take advantage of tremendous marketing exposure. Our national name recognition shot through the roof."

"When the show aired, we stood by with Novell's phone number, but we never had to call," said Wignall. "In fact, SUSE Linux Enterprise Server is so reliable that we have yet to call Novell for support. SUSE Linux Enterprise Server is a solid, proven platform."

SUSE Linux Enterprise Server ensures that Keller Homes can offer optimum Web performance for its customers, employees and partners. Users are no longer frustrated by periodic downtime and have regained trust in the online tools and technologies to do their jobs.

"We have always been on the cutting edge of using technology to build homes and Common Knowledge

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Technology has created an IT strategy that supports our business plans,” said Hill. “We liked their approach because they are direct about the realities of what can be done. They are a critical partner for us in ensuring that our network stays up and running.”

> Results

With SUSE Linux Enterprise Server, Keller Homes upgraded its Web servers for a third the cost of an alternative solution. The company consolidated its servers

by nearly 80 percent and was able to re-use its existing hardware, achieving a 60 percent reduction in total cost of ownership. Money saved can now be reinvested in making its Web sites more efficient.

SUSE Linux Enterprise Server has reduced administration time by 95 percent and eliminated downtime. Marketing exposure from *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* brought national name recognition for potential clients moving to the Colorado area. The company estimates that its Linux solution paid for itself in just four months.

“If our Web servers fail, our business shuts down,” said Hill. “Our Web site is our number-one marketing tool and it’s critical that potential customers get a good first impression. SUSE Linux Enterprise Server has eliminated any downtime that could cost us opportunities we would never get again.”

Article Summary

Products and Services:

SUSE Linux Enterprise Server with built-in Xen virtualization

Results:

- Eliminated Web server downtime
- Consolidated servers by nearly 80 percent
- Reduced administration time by 95 percent
- Reduced total cost of ownership by 60 percent