



SASSA

To provide users at rural offices with cost-effective access to central IT systems, including Novell® GroupWise® e-mail clients, SASSA worked with Open Technology Distribution to deploy Linux Desktop Multiplier from Omni—a solution which enables a single, low-cost PC to provide virtualised SUSE® Linux Enterprise Desktop environments for up to ten concurrent users.

Overview

The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) is responsible for the administration, management and payment of social grants for various groups within South African society, such as parents and foster-parents, the elderly, disabled people and war veterans. SASSA employs around 7,000 people, many of whom work in small rural offices across the country.

Challenge

SASSA serves its citizens via a network of more than 200 local offices in cities, towns and villages across South Africa. When someone wants to apply for a social grant, they need to visit the nearest office and fill out a number of forms. These forms then need to be processed by a central system called SOCPEN, which runs at SASSA headquarters in Pretoria.

“At offices in the cities, where there was a good communications infrastructure, our employees were able to log in to SOCPEN and process the application forms themselves,” said Jabulani Makondo, Head of IT Operations at SASSA. “But the rural offices had to physically send their application forms to be processed at other offices where there is ICT infrastructure. This could take more than a week.”

SASSA wanted to speed up the process by implementing a new IT and communications infrastructure to connect the local offices with its central systems. However, the cost of setting up traditional IT networks and fixed-line communications would have been prohibitive—around R300,000 per office per year. Moreover, many offices lacked sufficient electricity supplies to power such an infrastructure.

Solution

SASSA began looking for a more cost-effective approach. Members of its IT team visited Novell to discuss the possibilities of open source technologies, and were given a demonstration of a new solution—Linux Desktop Multiplier from Novell Partner Omni TS.

Linux Desktop Multiplier is a virtualisation solution that enables up to ten instances of SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop to run on a single low-cost PC. By adding extra video cards and monitors, USB keyboards and mice, the solution enables multiple users to access desktop applications simultaneously from the same PC.

“We saw the potential of the solution at once,” said Mr. Makondo. “We would only need to buy one PC for each office, and we

SASSA at a glance:

Agency responsible for the administration of social security

■ Industry:

Government

■ Location:

South Africa

■ Products and Services:

SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop
Novell GroupWise
Omni Linux Desktop Multiplier

■ Results:

- Created a cost-effective model for IT deployment in rural SASSA offices—saving an estimated R250,000 (US\$31,000) per site
- Provided remote access to central SASSA systems, enabling social grant applications to be processed within just 24 hours
- Delivered a simple, standardised solution that can be set up within a few hours and used by staff without requiring extensive training

“Offices equipped with the Linux desktop solution can now process social grant applications within 24 hours—delivering a much more efficient service and ensuring that citizens get the help they need as quickly as possible.”

Jabulani Makondo

*Head of IT Operations
SASSA*

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would not need to worry about switches and other network equipment. This would not only save money—it would also make the solution quick to deploy and easy to maintain, which is important because we don't have IT experts at every office.”

A single PC connected to several energy-efficient monitors also uses considerably less electricity than a traditional network, making it possible to deploy the solution at almost any location, even where power supplies are limited.

“To enable the solution to connect with our central systems, we decided to use 3G wireless communications technology,” said Mr. Makondo. “Again, this was many times cheaper than a traditional fixed-line infrastructure—bringing the solution within our budget.”

SASSA worked with Novell South Africa, Open Technology Distribution (Omni's South African distributor) and a local hardware supplier, Proline Computers, to run a proof-of-concept for a three-user system at SASSA headquarters. Successful testing of this system led to a pilot programme at 12 sites in Limpopo Province, and then to a wider rollout. Currently, more than 50 offices have been equipped with the solution, and SASSA hopes to bring all 200 online in the near future.

Results

Thanks to the simplicity of the solution, SASSA and Open Technology Distribution can set up a new office with a PC running Linux Desktop Multiplier and SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop in just a few hours, and staff can get up and running on SOCPEN

almost immediately. Compared to a standard solution with multiple PCs, this saves an estimated R250,000 (US\$31,000) per site.

“Offices equipped with the Linux* desktop solution can now process social grant applications within 24 hours—delivering a much more efficient service and ensuring that citizens get the help they need as quickly as possible,” said Mr. Makondo. “Staff can also access Novell GroupWise e-mail and other applications, helping to significantly increase productivity. SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop provides a very simple interface, so it is easy for staff to use, even with very little formal IT training.”

The low resource requirements of SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop make it an ideal operating system for SASSA offices in deep rural areas—getting the best possible performance from the most cost-effective hardware. The local offices can run up to ten concurrent sessions on a single machine, without any need to invest in specific proprietary hardware. As a result SASSA can choose any local manufacturer to supply the computers—obtaining optimal value for money and ensuring effective local support.

“The South African government has an open technology strategy, and we are keen to follow it—we use standardised, commodity hardware and open source software wherever possible,” said Mr. Makondo. “SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop and Linux Desktop Multiplier give us the tools we need to run an efficient operation across the entire country, without the prohibitive costs of traditional proprietary solutions.”



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