

Thin-client makers ride Linux bandwagon

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SAN FRANCISCO--Thin is in again, at least for a spell, as hardware makers use Linux to sell companies on the idea of forsaking full-fledged PCs in favor of stripped-down "thin clients."

In the 1990s, Microsoft foes Oracle and Sun Microsystems advocated, with little success, using thin clients that they called the Network Computer and [Sun Ray](#), respectively. The sales pitch--that it's cheaper to leave the heavy lifting to central servers and avoid the management and security headaches of PCs--hasn't yet won over the masses.

This week at the LinuxWorld Conference and Expo, thin-client sellers used Linux to spruce up their offerings. The most notable convert is [Wyse Technology](#), a longtime thin-client maker that had found Linux unsatisfactory in 2000.

"Mainly because of increased interest from our customer base, we have decided to make the Linux thin client an integral part of our product offering," Wyse said in a statement. "A great deal of our customers are asking for Linux-based thin clients, and a recent IDC report suggests that Linux-based thin clients have reached about 20 percent of the total thin-client market."

Wyse provides its own version of the operating system, Wyse Linux V6, which is based on the [newer 2.6 kernel](#) and software from embedded-Linux specialist [MontaVista Software](#), the company said. Named the Winterm 5150SE, the Wyse thin client uses Advanced Micro Devices' Geode GX 533 processor and costs US\$399.

Thin clients require a server, but they often handle basic processing themselves. Windows CE and Windows XP Embedded are common thin-client operating system choices, but Linux also competes with the [SCO Group's UnixWare](#) in the market.

Indeed, last week, [Rouse's Supermarkets](#), a chain of 15 stores in Louisiana, switched from UnixWare thin clients to Linux thin clients supplied by [ACR Retail Systems](#). The supermarket chain uses the thin clients for its point-of-sale terminals.

Also this week at LinuxWorld, Hewlett-Packard announced an upgraded thin client, the Compaq t5515, which uses an 800MHz Crusoe processor from Transmeta.

And Sun Microsystems, whose Sun Ray thin clients do no processing but rather display what a server directs them to display, is demonstrating a new version of its software that lets Linux servers control the Sun Rays. Previously, the thin clients could be used only with Solaris servers.