

Is Windows the only real choice for small to medium business?

An article by

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The short answer – yes. The Personal Computer (PC), believe it or not, is still the same fundamental design as it was when first released by IBM in 1980, and there were many operating systems written by other companies to run on it. Surviving examples include Windows and Linux and lesser known specialist systems such as Solaris and OS/2. Apple Mac was originally written on different system from the IBM model, but today they are very similar in design.

An Operating System is software written to manage a computer. They enable the keyboard and mouse to interact with the visuals on the screen; allow programs to perform tasks, send audio to the speakers etc. All operating system differ in how they interact with the hardware or circuitry of a PC, and this makes them unique from each other, irrespective of how similar they may appear on the screen.

Because of this uniqueness, any programs written such Apple iTunes, Adobe Acrobat Reader Microsoft Word etc, must have a separate version written for each operating system.

As commercial concerns these programs need to be maintained and updated and hence become a question of viability. Due more to brilliant marketing than brilliant engineering, Microsoft Windows now currently dominates 90% of the desktop market, for both commercial and home users. Apple around 9% and Linux 1%. Therefore writing and maintaining versions for all operating systems is unviable, and in most cases simply not considered.

You cannot buy a version of Microsoft Office that will run on Linux, nor QuickBooks or MYOB. You can buy these applications for Apple (Microsoft own 10% of Apple) but there are many other common programs out there that will not run on the Mac let alone Linux. This is important if you are considering an industry specific software package for your business.

Another obstruction is familiarity and training. Nearly every person you employ will know how to use Windows to a point. Apple much less so, and Linux, well most will never have heard of it. (Linux has a strong market in the Web Hosting industry; other than that it's a geek toy). Apple history is rooted in the graphical and desktop publishing industry where its design excelled over Windows for this purpose. There is little difference these days other than a user preference by lovers of the 'Mac.

There are other reasons other than above why Apples fall short of the mark for Business use. Apple service engineers are in shorter supply and more expensive than Windows technicians. Their products often don't mix well with other office peripherals such as non-Mac Servers and network printers. And the total cost of ownership of an Apple Mac, considering their initial purchase price is double that of their PC equivalents, is much higher when measuring productivity returns.

On the plus side apple Macs enjoy a relative virus free existence, negating the need for security software. This is a case of scale: Less Apple users; less Apples hackers (and malware). Apple Macs in the work place, which is what we are talking about there, really only exist as a matter personal choice, and if you are a Mac lover, you would best researching and deploying a dedicated Apple network. Depending on your business requirements however, in most cases would not be a pragmatic or financially expedient choice.

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