IBM

Beall's unites distributed environment with Linux-based emulation solution.

Overview

- **Application**
  Terminal emulation solution based on Linux to provide access to corporate applications for distributed retailer

- **Business Benefits**
  Over $200,000 in potential savings in licensing costs versus Microsoft® Windows® environment; ability to easily share information across a distributed environment, for greater employee efficiency

- **Software**
  IBM DB2® Universal Database™; IBM 4690 Operating System; Red Hat Enterprise Linux WS, Version 8.0; Ericom PowerTerm® InterConnect (Linux Edition), Version 6.6.2

- **Hardware**
  IBM @server iSeries™; IBM @server xSeries®

- **Business Partner**
  Ericom Software, Inc.

Profitable growth has been a constant at Beall's since the 1950s, when E.R. Beall began opening department stores in Florida shopping centers.

Sun Belt shoppers — from the committed shop-until-you-drop variety to those who venture out only when their favorite pants are in shreds — have good reason to know the name of Beall's, Inc. (*www.beallsinc.com*). Through its subsidiaries — Beall's Department Stores, Inc., Beall's Outlet Stores, Inc. and Burke's Outlet Stores, Inc. — the corporation has grown from modest beginnings in 1915 to operate almost 500 retail store sites from Florida to California.

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–Keith Starks, Director of Network Engineering, Beall's, Inc.

e business

With a principal operating strategy to grow the corporation using its profits, Beall's relies on IBM and Linux for a positive impact on the bottom line.

Headquartered in Bradenton, Florida, with approximately 10,000 employees and annual sales exceeding $750 million, Beall's has always minded the store in terms of cost control. For instance, while each operating company has its own buying staff, product development group and advertising strategy, the companies take advantage of resource sharing by utilizing distribution, finance, information systems, loss prevention, human resources and other synergistic functions provided by headquarters. Despite these measures, the corporation still faced rising costs, including high licensing expenses related to operating and maintaining its enterprise-wide desktop computer systems. This was certainly not good news, particularly for a privately held company whose chief operating strategy is to grow through profits,

despite being in an industry with slim margins in even the best of economies. Beall's had to find new ways to cut costs.

Beall's implements IBM xSeries running Linux

Aware of the savings advantages of standardized business systems, Beall's decided to replace the DOS-based PC platform used in all of its stores with IBM @server xSeries systems running Linux.

"IBM is a recognized leader in the Linux community, so we felt very comfortable in deploying an open-source platform on IBM hardware," says Keith Starks, director of Network Engineering at Beall's.

But the company also needed a terminal emulation solution so that store office personnel could access green-screen legacy systems residing on its back-end IBM @server iSeries system at headquarters. After evaluating several solutions for Linux, the company selected terminal emulation software from IBM Business Partner Ericom Software.

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> *—Eric Fernwood, Vice President of Marketing, Ericom Software, Inc.*

Beall's estimates the Linux solution can potentially save approximately $200,000 in initial licensing costs when implemented across the enterprise. It's now in use in 74 department stores. In addition, new browser capabilities provided by Linux give Beall's greater application flexibility, as demonstrated by its adoption of a new efficiency-enhancing, Web-based application for employee scheduling.

Connecting to a wide range of systems

Each Beall's store has two xSeries servers (models 8478 and 8480), connected through a modem-sharing device to the company's iSeries system, which runs IBM DB2 Universal Database at corporate headquarters. One xSeries server, which runs IBM OS 4690 General Sales Application, serves as the store's point-of-sales system controller. The other xSeries system, which serves as the green-screen terminal for the back-end iSeries server, runs Red Hat, Version 8.0 and Ericom's PowerTerm InterConnect Linux Edition software. Throughout the day, the store manager and office staff use the Linux desktop machine to run a variety of home-grown applications such as customer credit information, payroll, merchandising inquiries including item file, purchase orders, transaction lookup, and Stockroom

At Beall's, it's the people who determine the company's success, along with a good strategic direction and adequate capital.

functions such as Transfers and RTV's. They also access and print weekly sales analysis reports, price change documents and other timely information.

Says Eric Fernwood, vice president of marketing at Ericom, "Although Red Hat Linux includes office tools, in most companies, Beall's included, desktop office solutions also need a reliable way to connect to IBM mainframes, iSeries machines and other systems, which run existing applications. That's where we're able to add value."

He continues, "Linux addresses a major issue facing corporate America—the high cost of client systems. Running new versions of Windows to support expensive office products forces businesses to continually upgrade to bigger and better hardware. For a company with thousands of client PCs, the costs can add up fast. Our customers want to get off that bandwagon because dollars are just not that easy to come by anymore."

Tapping into IBM's support of Linux

PowerTerm InterConnect Linux Edition is just one of Ericom's many offerings. Ericom develops, markets and supports a complete line of interconnectivity software products, and has more than 4 million installations in 45 countries. "We'd heard about retail successes with Linux in terms of robust performance, stability and cost-efficiency," recalls George Hiskes, vice president of information systems at Beall's. "When we began searching for software solutions that would provide terminal emulation to host systems on Linux, we were pleased to find in Ericom a company that met our needs and provided another channel to IBM's Linux expertise and resources."

Beall's had tried several solutions and found them all to be feature-deficient when compared to Ericom's products. Says Starks, "Once we saw that Ericom's solution for Linux had the keyboard keystroke mapping that we needed and the ability to completely interface with iSeries servers from a terminal emulation perspective,

we promptly decided to go with it." In addition to Ericom, Beall's also contacted IBM early on in its decision process. "IBM was very responsive to our needs and helped us assess the various Linux alternatives," adds Starks.

Keeping retail network connected

For now, the Beall's IT team is keeping busy implementing the PowerTerm/ Linux solution in all 425 of its outlet stores. As new stores open, they too will benefit from the solution. Says Hiskes, "Linux provides us with a robust, inexpensive operating system, as well as the assurance of flexibility and scalability to support our growth. With our Linux-based emulation solution, our stores are always connected and in sync with their information, which enables them to operate more efficiently and be more responsive to customers."

For more information

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