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[Feature]

The Core of Security

More SMBs are turning to Apple products to meet their stability and security needs.

By Karen D. Schwartz

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Geraldine O'Mahoney and Patrick Johnson of SBLM Architects say security is the main reason they switched to Macs.

SBLM Architects stakes its reputation on delivering innovative, well-designed building renderings to its customers. Until recently, the New York architectural firm created those renderings on Windows PCs running an Adobe software suite, but a turn of events prompted the IT department to consider a major change: moving to Apple Macs.

"We have been around for several decades, and we have been a PC shop for the entire time, but the security issues are becoming a bigger and bigger issue," says Geraldine O'Mahoney, IT director of the 69-employee firm.

Those security issues, plus the increased interoperability of the Mac and PC, convinced O'Mahoney to buy two 27-inch

iMacs and two Mac Minis running Snow Leopard for the company's graphics and design department, with an eye toward buying more if those work well.

The security issues were one of the major drivers for making the switch.



"We have antivirus running constantly on every PC, and at least once or twice a month somebody gets a virus where their computer is completely useless until we wipe it out and rebuild it," says Patrick Johnson, the firm's systems engineer.

But that's only the tip of the iceberg for SBLM, which must consider the proprietary nature of its customers' renderings. "Confidentiality is key," O'Mahoney says. "We can't run the risk of pictures of a client's building being leaked onto the Internet."

[subhed] Seeking Safe Havens

Security is a major driver for companies moving to the Apple platform, says Laura DiDio, principal at consultants Information Technology Intelligence Corp.

A recent survey from ITIC found that 70 percent of businesses rated the security of Apple and its OSX operating system software as either excellent or very good, while 82 percent rated the reliability of Mac hardware and operating system software as excellent or very good.

In addition to security, mobility and agility, DiDio gives high marks to Apple for its compatibility with cloud computing, citing its integration with Google's cloud computing offering, the Google App Engine. ITIC expects Apple to expand its reach into the cloud,

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All of this adds up to increasing adoption by SMBs. "This is a very sustainable trend," DiDio says. "It's not an anomalous blip on the radar screen."

Brian Pasch, CEO of Internet marketing firm Pasch Consulting Group, decided to take advantage of a Black Friday sale just before Christmas 2009 to dive into the Mac world. He started with about a dozen iMacs and plans to buy iMacs for the rest of his 30 employees during the first few months of this year.

"When I started looking at all the things my employees do, I realized that there was no reason anymore to say that Windows was a business environment and Mac was for graphics designers," Pasch says.

What's more, the viruses and malware his employees were experiencing on their PCs running Microsoft Vista were getting in the way of productivity. "We had many situations where a PC would get a virus that we couldn't get rid of for days," he says. "My employees were really getting frustrated."

During the first six months of 2009, enterprise worm infections increased by nearly **100%** from the previous six months.

Source: Microsoft Security Intelligence Report

Business Necessity

For Kevin Burton, moving to a Mac environment was a matter of security for his business, Burton Asset Management. The Scottsdale, Ariz., company manages risk, security and business continuity for its clients, which depend heavily on Burton Asset Management in case of emergencies.

"If we don't have access to deep-drive drill data on security issues, trends and even the CIA handbook for a given region in the palm of our hands at the time of exposure to a customer, we're not closing business and satisfying our customers," Burton says.

That's what was happening, at least sporadically, when the 28-person company was running Windows. Four years ago, Burton says, before the company switched to Macs, he was spending at least two hours a day providing technical support to employees.

Many were hampered by patch upgrades and couldn't do their work. They were spending time weeding out spyware and malware, rebuilding machines, even over-nighting notebooks to field personnel whose systems wouldn't work. "It was killing us in terms of productivity," says Burton.

Today, the company uses Macs for everything. In addition to Mac desktops and notebooks, the company uses iPhones and Apple servers.

Burton says productivity increased substantially, but could have been even higher if he had done what he advises other companies to do: create a business plan for leveraging the efficient platform that the Mac provides — before installing them.

"Had I realized that moving from a Volkswagen to a Ferrari would eventually turn us into race-car drivers, I would have prepared my business model differently," he says.

"Bringing Macs into your business can take real-time communication and decision-making to a new level, and if you plan for it, you can leverage it to grow your business as we have — three-fold in four years."

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