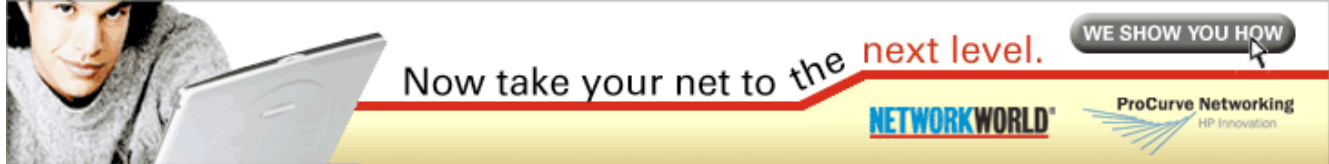


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This story appeared on Network World at <http://www.networkworld.com/news/2007/022707-mac-os-going-corporate.html>

# Mac OS being infused with the tools of the corporate IT trade, but can it catch on?

Users say Intel-based Macs are changing the landscape slowly.

By [John Fontana](#), Network World, 02/27/07

[Apple](#), long a ghost in the corporate-infrastructure mainstream, is beginning to cast a shadow as IT departments discover Mac platforms that are being transformed into realistic alternatives to Windows and Linux.

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A number of factors are helping raise the eyebrows of those responsible for upgrading desktops and servers: for example, Apple's shift to the [Intel](#) architecture; the inclusion of infrastructure and interoperability hooks, such as directory services in the Mac OS X Server; dual-boot capabilities; clustering and storage technology; third-party virtualization software; and comparison shopping, which is being fostered by migration costs and hardware overhauls associated with [Microsoft's](#) Vista.

Despite these goodies, however, Apple isn't pushing into corporations with a defined desktop strategy. The company still does not have a formal division focused on developing software for the enterprise or supporting it. And it refused *Network World's* requests to discuss its plans for enterprise customers.

"Because of the switch to Intel, success of the Mac OS X, the stability and elegance of the platform, the Mac is a very viable alternative, but it would require a dramatic shift in the company's resource allocation to go after the enterprise," says Van Baker, an analyst with Gartner.

IT shops that have dipped their toes in Apple's pool of desktop and server platforms say others should test the water.

"Intel Macs have really changed things. Beyond the obvious comparisons — that Macs are now speed-parity with Wintel machines — vendors have been able to develop more software for the platform, and where that is impossible, virtual machines are always an option," says Scott Melendez, manager of enterprise messaging for the city and county of San Francisco, who brought Macs into governmental offices in 2003 and says they are there to stay alongside Windows machines.

"There will always be a stigma by some old-time network managers — that Macs are difficult to network — from the AppleTalk days, or that they are difficult to support because it's not Windows. By the end of 2007, however, I think the landscape will have changed," Melendez says.

It's a heady prediction, because Mac's share of the desktop market has been hovering around 4% since 2000 and isn't expected to change through 2010, IDC says. IDC's numbers for Mac are worse in the server market, where the Mac OS X Server's share is well below 1% vs. other options.

Users are helping rock that boat, however.

"We use Mac Xserve and Xserve RAID as the heart of the backup strategy we have throughout the corporation," says Kevin Hansen, manager of IT for Quadion, which manufactures rubber and plastic components. Xserve is Apple's Intel-based storage platform. "All our Windows 2000 and 2003 boxes back up to the Xserve," he says.

Hansen put the backup infrastructure in place two years ago and since has added an Xserve to back up all the company's CAD drawings. "It is great for that. It has lots of scalability and terabytes of disk space," he says.

Others are being drawn in for a peek as they evaluate Microsoft's Vista client operating system and what it will take to migrate.

"The changes in Vista are significant enough that we think we can absorb the change going to Macs just as easily as going to Vista," says Tom Gonzales, a senior network administrator for the Colorado State Employees Credit Union in Denver. He says the thought of going to Apple is not as scary as it once was. "If you had asked me two years ago to consider Macs, I would have laughed. But Boot Camp and [Parallels](#), anything we can't do with our Macs we would be able to run a Windows environment under there," says Gonzales, who is currently in the Mac evaluation stage.

Boot Camp is coming this spring, in the next version of the Mac operating system code-named Leopard. It lets users install and run Windows XP on their Macs.

Parallels is a company that develops virtualization software for the Mac that lets Windows, open source and Mac operating systems run simultaneously.

That's the type of innovation that is moving the Mac up the enterprise ladder.

"These capabilities help form a migration strategy," says Paul Suh, president of ps Enable, a consulting firm that specializes in systems integration and security for the Mac operating system and Mac OS X Server.

"There are lots of enterprise apps written to talk to massive databases or transaction-processing systems that would take years to rewrite. OK, so when you need to talk to those systems, you fire up the virtual machines and use it," Suh says.

However, Suh, who spent eight years at Apple beginning in the late '90s, admits it is not a perfect system, given the added support load over a single operating system environment.

The desktop, however, isn't the only place Apple has features enticing to corporations.

Mac OS X Server provides file and print, cross-platform management, security, and collaboration features, as well as support for POP and IMAP mail, FTP, DNS, and DHCP.

Apple's Xsan and Xgrid add storage-area networking and clustering options, and the server comes with an unlimited client license for no additional cost.

Apple also has added such open source packages as Apache, Samba, Kerberos, Postfix, Jabber, SpamAssassin and OpenLDAP; and has integrated them in a unified management interface.

OpenLDAP lets the Mac OS X Server plug into Microsoft's Active Directory and [Novell](#)'s eDirectory. The server's Kerberos infrastructure supports single sign-on, and the platform integrates with NT Domain services, so the server can function as a Primary Domain Controller or Backup Domain Controller in a Windows environment. That configuration lets Windows users authenticate against Mac OS X Server directly from their PC logon.

In Leopard, Apple will add a new iCal server, wiki server, content-searching features and podcast producer as proof that Apple is not playing catch-up but is out in front of the curve on providing social-networking tools.

Despite all those features, there are still some worms at Apple's core.

The company has no formal support infrastructure that rivals its famous, consumer-support Apple Store Genius Bar; and its selling focus is decidedly in the consumer market.

"To be successful with businesses, they would have to build up an enterprise selling organization if they wanted to gain greater growth in corporate environments," says Tim Bjarin, an analyst with Creative Strategies.

Others say Apple would need to rely on partnerships to open enterprise doors.

"Intel has a good-sized global sales organization; could Apple do a partnership with Intel? Sure, that is always a possibility," says Gartner's Baker.

In the end, some suggest, the big corporate milestone for Apple comes down to getting Mac into the heads and hands of the right people and letting the platform woo converts.

“I guess I still don’t see Mac having crossed the awareness gap,” says ps Enable’s Suh. “It has started to seep into IT consciousness, but there is still a lot of prejudice out there, with some saying Mac is not ready for prime time. Until that awareness gap is closed, then everything else is secondary.”

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