

IT WEEK NEWS

NT gains custom support

Martin Veitch

With the end-of-support deadline for Windows NT 4.0 Server less than three weeks away, Microsoft has detailed custom options for firms that want to keep the veteran operating system running. But the potential high costs mean most firms will look elsewhere for continued protection.

Paid-for phone and security patch support for NT 4.0 will finish at the end of this year unless firms buy a custom contract that covers them for up to two years. Buyers can pay in three-month chunks for "critical" and "important" updates.

The firm said 10 percent to 15 percent of Windows servers deployed in the UK are still running NT 4.0, but did not disclose pricing for its new support options. "We don't publish price lists for custom support agreements and we can only give an indication to individual customers once

we have qualified their interest," the company said in a statement.

David Roberts, chief executive of user group The Corporate IT Forum, said that some members had reported quotes in the region of £300,000 per year for custom support.

"The previous projections were regarded as outrageous," he said. "Corporate IT buyers can't believe they're being left stranded or taken to the cleaners. They went through the pain of making the wretched thing work and now they're being asked to pay astronomical fees after a relatively short period of usage."

Mark Tennant, Windows Server product manager, said some customers would choose to run NT 4.0 programs partitioned under virtualisation software such as VMware or Microsoft's own Virtual Server.

LAST-MINUTE NT PLANNING

Try
virtualisation
Upgrade
Shift from
core network



Consider
custom
support
Move
critical
apps

Other firms may de-risk NT servers by uncoupling them from core networks. The alternative of running unsupported software may cause operational risks – six security patches for Windows NT were posted in November. Regulatory

problems could also arise if companies break security standards such as BS7799.

"There are ways to minimise the risk but I think it's amazing how slowly industry has reacted to the change," said Robert May, managing director of IT consultancy Ramsac. "There are people who say if it's not broke, don't fix it – but it is broke."

A similar custom programme will be available for Microsoft Exchange 5.5. Extended support for this product is due to expire at the end of 2005.

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