

Tech Valley entrepreneur leads Linux revolution

Lille Corp. was born in 1998 to help local companies increase the efficiency of their existing computer systems, while also keeping an eye on their future needs.

Today, founder Jordan Rosen is bringing the future to them.

With the successful transformation of his client, Capital Cardiology Associates, to a Linux-based computer system, Rosen and his team of less than 10 full-time employees have fired the first shot in the uprising against the Microsoft monopoly.

It won't be the last.

"As the Linux momentum continues to grow, Tech Valley is going to be ground zero for this change," Rosen said. "You've got a palpable, tangible taste of revolution in the air. Companies are not only going at it because it is a business opportunity – and it is a true business opportunity – but also because of a little 'it's about time' attitude.

"The motivation and the energy behind this is pretty unique, and it's exciting," he said. "It brings you back to the '80s from a computing standpoint. There's a sense that some really good things are going to happen. The revolution of Linux is starting in Tech Valley, and you watch what the springboard effect will be. It'll be huge."

While Linux is not new, it accounted for only a three-percent share of the operating system marketplace in 2003, compared to 94 percent for Microsoft. However, it differs from other Microsoft challengers such as Apple and the failed OS2 from IBM in several ways, including its ease of use, business-specific applications without the added weight of unnecessary programs, reliability and increased financial savings, particularly due to minimal maintenance costs and the elimination of viruses.

Enter Lille Corp., based on Southwoods Blvd. in Albany, with a satellite office in Boston. Having successfully integrated its e-scribe system six years ago as an online medical records solution for dictating physicians, Rosen was approached by Dr. Martin Echt, CEO of Capital Cardiology Associates, to find and make functional an improved

connection between CCA's 200 terminals in 14 locations in and around Tech Valley.

After experimenting in the company's computer labs and doing some piloting with their initial users to get practical feedback, Rosen and Lille Corp. were able to convert CCA from a Microsoft-based system to a completely open-source, thin-client Linux solution, which has been up and running since late 2002. In November of 2003, at the Desktop Linux Consortium at Boston University that included companies from around the world, Rosen refuted the notion that Linux wouldn't be a viable alternative to Microsoft until 2005 at the earliest.

"We stood up and said, 'We completed a 200-person conversion. We eliminated Microsoft. We have eliminated the virus and security problems, and we are now working on new installations. In other words, we've done it,'" Rosen said.

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Lille Corp.

"The response was everyone coming around and saying, 'We want to do what you're doing.' It's been that crazy," he said. "Here we are in Tech Valley, and it turns out that Lille Corp. has completed the largest thin-client Linux installation in the United States, with success."

In the year and a half since the switch, Echt reports no issues with the system, and continues to be impressed with Lille Corp.'s expertise and support.

"We've had a great relationship with Jordan and I said to him, 'There's got to be a better way,'" Echt said. "Microsoft is not designed for easy maintenance; it's designed to be constantly upgraded and refreshed. No one has ever said Linux was an inferior system. We are very happy with it. We've had zero problems with the desktops. It's really quite impressive."

Capital Cardiology treats 40,000 patients a year and handles 30,000 diagnostic procedures, with \$22 million in annual revenue.



Jordan Rosen, founder of Lille Corp. of Albany, is one of 20 people worldwide named to a list of "Linux Luminaries" by Linux World Magazine. Rosen is pictured in the server room at Capital Cardiology Associates, a multi-practice health-care provider he assisted in switching to a Linux operating system.

"There are some downsides. Linux is not as flashy, and commercial programs are limited," Echt said. "We're using billing software, inventory software and spreadsheets, all in what's called open source, available for no charge and actively supported by those large companies.

"The Linux system, in and of itself, is much more stable. It doesn't break down. It has no danger for viruses. That's a big deal," Echt said. "You have hundreds of thousands of people around the world working to improve it. It's an open system, and only in the open market do you see real innovation. It's just a question of market."

Thanks to the efforts of Rosen and others, that market is expanding. Rosen returned March 24 from a five-day conference in Salt Lake City, where he met with executives from IBM and Provo, Utah-based Novell Inc., which last November purchased SuSE Linux of Germany. As a result of that deal and Novell's acquisition of desktop Linux maker Ximian, IBM has invested \$50 million in Novell to help it develop Linux-related products.

"It's become a mainstream event, somewhat of a phenomena. It's the other Windows, but it's better," said Rosen, who also spoke at Real World Linux in Toronto in April. "Albany is so perfectly situated for software development and leadership. There are smaller companies out there that are doing some pretty incredible things."

— Written by Phil Janack