Pick n Pay

To improve control and monitoring of IT systems at its retail locations, Pick n Pay deployed SUSE® Linux Enterprise Point of Service. The solution provides proactive management and total control of an extensive POS estate.

Overview
Pick n Pay is one of South Africa's largest retailers, selling food, general merchandise, liquor, clothing and pharmaceuticals at more than 480 stores across the country. It employs approximately 36,000 people and reported a turnover of 51.9 billion rand (US$7.6 billion) in 2011.

Challenge
Pick n Pay operates a large retail network, which consists of hypermarkets, supermarkets, pharmacies, and convenience stores. In an increasingly competitive environment, it is vital for the company to maximize operational efficiency and enhance the customer experience while keeping costs low. In order to achieve this, the company must ensure that its business-critical systems are built on a solid, reliable IT platform.

The IT team at Pick n Pay found that its existing point of service (POS) system was not delivering the high levels of flexibility, scalability and manageability that it required. The company was running one POS system for its clothing stores and another for all other operations, which further increased the complexity of managing its retail systems.

“Previously, we were using a Linux-based operating system, but it did not offer us the level of management that we required and it was not regularly maintained,” said Wesley Grisdale, Business Process Owner of Point of Sale Infrastructure at Pick n Pay. “We wanted to move to a version that had a more corporate approach to support, and that offered better control over our retail systems.”

Solution
Pick n Pay felt that it was crucial to select a POS solution that provided centralized management as the key aspect of its design, and believed that SUSE Linux Enterprise Point of Service represented the best fit for its needs.

“SUSE Linux Enterprise Point of Service makes it simple to monitor and control our extensive POS estate. As software deployment and maintenance are largely automated, we are able to spend less time on routine operations and can dedicate our resources to more business-critical tasks. In this way, we can deliver even better service to our customers.”

WESLEY GRISDALE
Business Process Owner, Point of Sale Infrastructure
Pick n Pay

Pick n Pay at a glance:
South Africa's second largest retailer of food, general merchandise and clothing

Industry and Location
Retail, South Africa

Products and Services
SUSE Linux Enterprise Point of Service

Results
+ Provided centralized, automated management of an extensive POS estate, reducing time spent on maintenance and support, and improving control of business systems
+ Enabled an enhanced lifecycle management of entire infrastructure, with improved overview of configuration, software versions and status of POS devices at all retail locations
+ Improved system resilience: in the event of network problems, stores can operate business-critical systems independently of branch or administrative servers
“SUSE Linux Enterprise Point of Service delivers everything we were looking for in a POS solution: it is cost-effective and flexible and, most importantly, it allows us to easily and proactively manage our systems from a central point of control.”

WESLEY GRISDALE
Business Process Owner, Point of Sale Infrastructure
Pick n Pay

SUSE Linux Enterprise Point of Service is designed specifically for retail environments, and combines the operating system base of SUSE Linux Enterprise with extensions that facilitate the creation of a POS managed client solution.

A typical architecture includes one central, directory-based administration server, which manages all branch servers and stores the master operating system images. The branch servers provide the infrastructure for deploying these images to the POS terminals, which can be cash registers, self-service kiosks, or even computerized petrol pumps.

“With SUSE Linux Enterprise Point of Service, Pick n Pay can create a central operating system image that is then deployed to its POS clients in the field,” said Martin Coetzee Technical Director at MarkeTech. “Before, they had to send out a dedicated IT administrator to manage OS rollouts and upgrades for individual branch servers. Now, everything is managed from a centralized point of control.”

Pick n Pay worked with MarkeTech Technology Group to design and implement SUSE Linux Enterprise Point of Service. The company is using the solution’s imaging suite to create and deploy client images for a wide variety of POS devices. Additionally, it has built a number of customized POS images with the help of the KIWI toolset.

To date, Pick n Pay has completed a rollout of SUSE Linux Enterprise Point of Service at its 64 clothing stores, and has begun deploying the solution at its various supermarket branches. It plans to have all of its retail locations standardized on SUSE Linux Enterprise Point of Service by the end of 2012.

Results
The SUSE Linux Enterprise Point of Service solution provides Pick n Pay with a more accurate view of its entire IT estate. “We used to work quite blindly in the past, as we were never certain what software was installed where,” said Grisdale. “We now have a guaranteed way of knowing exactly what version each terminal is running, which is a massive help when it comes to updates and maintenance.”

Pick n Pay also benefits from improved management of its POS systems. “For us, the platform’s centralized management is its main asset,” said Grisdale.

SUSE Linux Enterprise Point of Service offers a low total cost of ownership by eliminating licensing costs, so Pick n Pay only pays a yearly subscription fee for maintenance and support services. As the software is not tied to a specific device, the company can re-purpose existing hardware to run the application, eliminating the need for costly investment in new machines.

Additionally, Pick n Pay has been able to take advantage of the unique benefits of Linux, such as reduced hardware resource requirements, flexibility and open design, while also gaining the support and control offered by a maintained and enterprise-proven SUSE solution.