

# French police switch from Windows to Linux

[Russ Creech](#) 23 March 2009, 12:00 PM

**The French national police force has slashed its IT costs by 70 per cent by cutting Microsoft out of the equation.**

There are many arguments for or against switching from Windows to Linux. Many times these arguments are based more in fanaticism than fact.

In a [recent report](#), the French national police force, Gendarmerie Nationale, has provided some great facts supporting the switch from Windows to Linux.

In 2002, the Gendarmerie Nationale adopted a strictly open-standards IT policy in order to improve inter-organisation communications. Until 2004, a large part of the IT budget was spent on software licences -- between 12,000 and 15,000 licenses each year. In 2004, an accountant in the Gendarmerie Nationale tried OpenOffice and, after finding it a surprisingly competent replacement for its paid counterpart, started pushing for it to be adopted within the organization instead of Microsoft Office.

After a while, the police force completely switched over to OpenOffice for all their office needs along with adopting Thunderbird for email and Firefox for browsing. The switch was easy and required little to no training since the open source apps had a similar interface to the paid ones.

In 2007, they decided to go one step further and switch to an open operating system.

"Moving from Microsoft XP to Vista would **not** have brought us many advantages and Microsoft said it would require training of users. Moving from XP to Ubuntu, however, proved very easy. The two biggest differences are the icons and the games. Games are not our priority."

Currently Gendarmerie has about 5,000 PCs running Ubuntu, with another 15,000 planned to be switched over this year. By 2015, they hope to have the entire organization with all 90,000 computers running Ubuntu and open-source software.

This year their IT budget will be cut by 70%, but they will be just as capable as in previous years. Lieutenant-Colonel Xavier Guimard of Gendarmerie estimates that the organization "Since 2004 has saved 50 million euro on licences for standard office applications, hardware and maintenance."

Importantly, the Gendarmerie's reduced IT budget **contradicts** Microsoft's arguments that the 'total cost of ownership' of Windows is less than Linux, because Windows supposedly needs much less support and integration work than Linux does. The lower actual dollars being spent on IT in the French national police disproves Microsoft's argument -- in this organisation, at least.

If they want to keep their share of the PC market, Microsoft better make sure they offer an easy transition to Windows 7, along with some benefits of transitioning. Otherwise, we will likely be hearing about more and more organizations and businesses switching over to Linux this year and next.