Intel targets PC support costs

By April Jacobs
NEW YORK

Bracing for competition from network computing devices and hoping to grab some business in network management, Intel Corp. last week rolled out a strategy aimed at trimming corporate PC support and maintenance costs by 15% over the next year.

At its Wired For Management conference here, Intel executives said they can accomplish these cost savings by giving systems support staff better tools to diagnose and repair desktops remotely and by standardizing hardware and software components — such as Intel platforms running Windows NT.

"Initially, a lot of this stuff looks great, but I think I still have to see it to believe it," said Neal Abrams, information systems manager at New York-based Consentini Associates.

To arrive at the 15% cost-cutting goal, Intel used internal benchmarks from its IS migration plans and research, including a Gartner Group, Inc. study that shows PC ownership costs ranging from $9,000 to $12,000 annually.

In an unusual move at a vendor announcement, Intel trotted out its chief information officer, Louis Burns, to outline the company's plans to migrate its 50,000 users to Pentium-based hardware running Windows NT and Windows 95.

Burns said the PC is a safer bet for the enterprise than the network computer — generally described as a stripped-down device used primarily for accessing server-based applications and the Internet. "The network computer feels good, but it isn't flexible enough," he said.

Intel's strategy includes its LANDesk Support Center application for help desks and a series of Pentium Pro server platforms with built-in management hardware and software for remotely monitoring, diagnosing and repairing PC problems.

The company already offers a hardware monitoring chip on Intel motherboards that tracks conditions such as temperature and voltage and reports them back to Intel's LANDesk Client Manager software.

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Moving toward integration

Intel also has several efforts under way to integrate the LANDesk software with enterprise network management software such as Computer Associates International, Inc.'s Unicenter and Hewlett-Packard Co.'s OpenView.

Several users at the conference said because the strategy depends heavily on Intel's Pentium line, the predicted results may be unrealistic in the heterogeneous hardware environments at most companies.

For example, Paul Benziger, a vice president at BankAmerica International in New York, said his company has an array of hardware and software that would require a costly migration to bring it in line with Intel's strategy.

"What they have in mind is pretty good, but it will take most companies years to get there," he said. He added that even companies that have standardized on one vendor's hardware find themselves dealing with a mix of equipment when mergers and acquisitions take place.

Harry Tse, research director at The Yankee Group in Boston, said Intel's initiative to broaden its market is a natural progression, but the company will have to work to earn its place in areas such as network management software.