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Notes not worth it, some opponents say

Current system could be better; Lotus technology unneeded at UNL

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members with specialized computers. Kent Hendrickson, UNL associate vice chancellor for information services, has said those who did not want Lotus Notes would not be forced to use the system.

But students and faculty said the expense of Lotus Notes did not justify the benefits or lack of them to many campus users. The university does not make good use of the powerful computers it has now, they have said.

Tom Carrell, UNL assistant professor of special education and communication disorders, said he was concerned the university chose Lotus Notes for the wrong reasons.

UNL also is not buying into Lotus Notes on the system's own merits, he said, but because the current e-mail systems are so poorly operated.

The uninfo e-mail system has had the same problems for the last three years, he said, and they haven't been corrected.

Matt Evans, a computer engineering sophomore, said a common complaint about bigred was the long, numerical user names.

That's a policy decision, Evans said. Bigred users could be identified by letter-based user names, but university computer services decided to use numerical names.

Carrell said network operators have made the current UNL systems as unfriendly for users as possible. This makes Lotus Notes appealing to UNL computer users as a different system, not as the best system available for the university, he said.

The recent loss of the dial-in modem pool was an example of inconvenient service dictating policy changes, Carrell said.

The university's modem service was poor and inconvenient, he said, so people who wanted decent Internet access were happy to let an outside company provide the service.

"The more easily accessible they make things, the more people would use them," Carrell said.

Leader of the pack

Carrell said the university administration was correct in thinking Lotus Notes the best of all commercial systems.

"If Lotus is here and free, I probably would want to use it," he said.

Although UNL did get a good deal on Lotus Notes, the system is not free, he said.

About \$650,000 has been budgeted over six years for all hardware, software and support for Lotus Notes at UNL. Commercial businesses would pay much more, he said.

But the cost of Lotus Notes is still significant in this budget-crunching period.

"I really hate to see the university's budget being cut so much and spending so much money on (Lotus Notes)," he said.

In the past year, when the university sought to make a decision on a new e-mail and information-sharing computer system, the university did not consider any of the free options.

An example is Netscape e-mail, which is free to any university user. Eudora mail is also free on the Internet.

Walter Weir, NU assistant vice president and chief information officer, has said good e-mail systems were available free on the Internet.

More than mail

But e-mail is a small part of Lotus Notes capabilities, Weir said. Database sharing and applications development are more important facets of the system.

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TOM CARRELL
UNL assistant professor

Eudora mail is free, but the upgrade to make it comparable to other Lotus Notes applications besides e-mail would cost \$1,500 per user. NU will pay \$2 per user for Lotus Notes, he said.

Evans said Lotus Notes' database sharing capability may be a good idea for those elements of the university run like a business, including much of the administration and staff.

The university would make a mistake with Lotus Notes if it forced those who use computers for research to make the Lotus Notes switch, Evans said.

The Lotus Notes system is a "bloated system," he said, and is not written to Internet standards; in other words, the Internet has a standard e-mail system, which Lotus Notes does not follow. Evans said Lotus Notes was built to its own commercial standard.

Although this may not bother staff and administrators, computer users who need their e-mail system to fit the Internet standards could be disturbed.

Powers of persuasion?

Computer users who have invested in high-powered UNIX hardware could not use Lotus Notes as it would be purchased by the university, Evans said. UNIX hardware has a different operating system than popular Macintosh or Windows computers.

"By using Notes ... you're not gaining anything," he said. "You're just shutting off a fairly significant group of people and a fairly significant group of hardware."

For instance, with current e-mail systems, a user with a modem can access e-mail away from home on a text-only terminal.

Lotus Notes requires a POP system to check e-mail away from home, or a program such as Netscape that supports graphics.

Evans said shoving the Lotus Notes change down the throats of unwilling university members would be a mistake. Lotus Notes offered as an option would be acceptable, he said.

"If the students are left alone, if services like bigred are still made available, it could be OK," Evans said.

Bigred is an "incredible" machine and very powerful, he said. Its alpha processor is the world's fastest, he said, and allows it to handle mass quantities of e-mail easily.

Another machine the university operates is called CSE, Evans said, and it is also a very high-powered machine.

The Air Force uses a form of CSE for its flight simulations, Evans said, and the computer is cheaper and more powerful than Lotus Notes hardware.

The university would do well to handle the equipment it does have better, he said, and then look to Lotus Notes for administrators and others needing its capabilities other than e-mail.

Lotus Notes is a good system for some users, but not the answer to current system problems, he said.

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