

EBS workstation an impressive alternative

Dual Opteron server designed for Solaris 10 outdoes the big brands

By [Alan Zeichick](#)

April 25, 2005

It's unusual to encounter a high-end desktop PC designed specifically to run Solaris, Sun's version of Unix. It's particularly unusual to find one that runs dual Opteron processors and is offered by a third-party system builder. The HLS IIW (High Performance, Lower Cost, Secure System, Version 2 Workstation) workstation, built by EBS (Electronic Business Solutions), is just that.

EBS HLS IIW Workstation
EBS, www.ebsinc.com

Very Good 8.0

criteria	score	weight
Interoperability	9	20%
Performance	7	20%
Serviceability	8	20%
Availability	8	15%
Scalability	7	15%
Value	9	10%

Cost:

\$3,565 with dual 2.2GHz Opteron processors, 2GB RAM, 160GB hard drive, DVD-RW

Platforms:

Solaris

Bottom Line:

HLS IIW is a beautifully designed workstation with fast processors, plenty of scalability, and a plethora of ports. Its handcrafted design shows both inside and out. What's better, the system is far less expensive than mass-market dual-processor workstations such as those from Sun and Dell.

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In a nutshell: If you are comfortable buying technical workstations from second-tier players, this is an excellent system that offers a better price-performance ratio and more attention to detail than systems from name-brand players such as [Dell](#) ([Profile](#), [Products](#), [Articles](#)), Hewlett-Packard, [IBM](#) ([Profile](#), [Products](#), [Articles](#)), and Sun.

The first three of those players, of course, don't offer Solaris systems on AMD processors. Sun offers a dual-processor Opteron workstation, but it is more expensive and a lesser configuration.

The HLS IIW workstation comes in a standard tower-case configuration. The striking case is made of lightweight polished aluminum and glowing blue LEDs. The effect evokes Apple's industrial design rather than the utilitarian PC-clone market. Externally, it has two FireWire, two USB 1.1, four USB 2.0, and two audio ports. Half of these ports are on the back of the system; the others are behind a unique door on the top of the unit.

The system also has a built-in Broadcom Gigabit Ethernet port. There are four PCI-X (PCI Extended) slots and one AGP 8X slot. The system came with a PNY Technologies-branded Nvidia Quadro FX 500 graphics card, which has 128MB RAM and drives analog and digital monitors at a resolution of as much as 1,600 by 1,200 pixels. The workstation also contains a single power supply and two separate external cooling fans -- both of which are needed, as the system runs hot. However, the fans and power-supply cooling system are exceptionally quiet. Indeed, the whole computer is almost silent.

The four DIMM slots support as much as 8GB RAM. The review system contained 2GB RAM using two sockets; it also used the 2.2GHz version of the Opteron processor, which AMD calls the model 248.

There's lots of room for storage: EBS includes a floppy drive, a single 160GB ATA/133 hard drive, and a DVD-RW drive. Internally, the layout of the system is extremely clean and neat, showing a high degree of attention to detail. The company even used round shielded cables rather than fragile ribbon cables to connect the drives to the motherboard -- a nice touch, and one which makes the machine easier to service.

EBS preinstalled Solaris 10, the Java Desktop System, StarOffice, the Gnome UI, and other tools on the machine I tested. Everything worked flawlessly and with blazing speed. I was able to hot plug and hot install a number of peripherals, including a Brother HL-5170 laser printer, a SanDisk CompactFlash reader, a [Microsoft](#) ([Profile](#), [Products](#), [Articles](#)) USB trackball, and several USB jump drives.

The workstation also seamlessly adapted to several digital and analog monitors, choosing the correct resolution without having to fuss with X windows.

The HLS IIW workstation, running Solaris 10, offered me the best experience I've ever had using a Linux or Unix workstation. The price was also impressive: The system, as tested, was priced out by EBS as \$3,565. The closest equivalent from Sun is its Java Workstation W2100z, and building an analogous system using its online tool gave me a price of \$5,455.

What about Dell? The Texas-based company offers neither Opteron processors nor Solaris 10; its closest

equivalent is the Linux-based Precision Workstation 670n with dual 3.6GHz Xeon processors. With 2GB RAM and one 160GB hard drive, it priced out at \$4,864 -- and that's without the DVD-RW system.

With the HLS IIW, I've seen specs one would expect to find in a high-end game system running Windows -- not on a Unix workstation. There are a few things EBS could do better: the location of the internal speaker -- on a flat bottom area without air holes -- muffles the sound, and I'd like to see SATA drives, screwless access, and a clearer demarcation between the USB 1.1 and 2.0 ports.

Also, the warranty is for only one year, and on-site service is handled by a variety of EBS partners, not by the company itself. But for the price, great user experience, and beautiful system design, I'm not complaining.

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