

## Re: using PAM for authentication

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Hi Bill!

I agree that OS services are usually tested thoroughly enough to rely on their security.

But:

Security: If you create an OS user account for each user in your web-application (and there can be many of them), these user may gain rights to the system they don't really need. So the chance that if your application has some security-related bug the user may be logged in to your application server. This is something I really don't like when I'm talking about >100 users. If the user can crash the application that's one thing. If he can try "su" that's another.

Maintenance: Big applications usually define their own life-cycle for users which has some influence on the authentication procedure. Example: Some user signs in to your application: A user is created, but remains inactive until a mail sent by the application is replied, some link is requested, whatever. Then the user gets activated through the application. In order to be able to do this kind of operation on the \*nix you have to be root. So some process of the application must be able to su or have some sudo kind of access to the user administration of the system. => No good.

Portability: If my users are in some kind of database of its own, I don't have to care about operating system stuff when I take the application and deploy it on some new system. You also don't have to deal with the network security staff, who are always reluctant to change anything in a living (productive) environment. The application also gains some more independence from the os flavour, as it is a little more decoupled.

I don't know who of us is right. Most probably this decision has to be made for each and every case and the result will differ with different requirements.

Regards,  
Reinhard

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