
Open-Source Software – Ready for Prime Time in Small Consultancies?



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Open source is gaining momentum on the desktop

- Proven flexible and reliable in the server world
 - Apache web server 66% of hosts, e.g., Google, Yahoo
 - GNU/Linux operating system 30% of hosts = #1
 - Sendmail 42% of mail servers, qmail another 17%
 - Bind 95% of Domain Name Servers
- Heavyweights (incl. IBM and Sun) now active supporters
- Now moving into the desktop space, currently dominated by Microsoft with 92% of sales in 2002
- Some important recent adoptions of desktop open source (e.g., Munich 80,000 desktops); 20% of market in 5 years
- For those CTCA members who are small businesses, is this an interesting alternative to closed-source software?

Source: <http://www.dwheeler.com>, NewsForge

What Is Open Source?



The collaborative model of open source puts quality and genetic diversity back into software

- “Free as in freedom” -- Free to run a program for any purpose, study and modify the source code, and distribute the original or modified program, without royalties
 - Peer review leads to demonstrated quality & security
 - Visibility keeps out spyware, backdoors, hidden features
 - Not necessarily the same as “free as in beer”
- Volunteer core of developers, plus developers paid by enterprises
- Businesses make money by assembling and packaging components and building and selling derived commercial applications
- Low entry barriers preserve creative opportunities

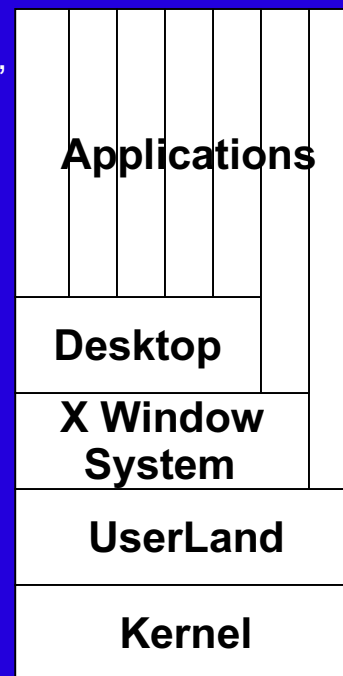


Putting it Together for Users

Untutored users can now obtain pre-packaged open-source software

- Distribution packagers gather and integrate all the software components needed for practical systems
 - Leading commercial distributions include Red Hat, Suse, Mandrake
 - Ease of installation
 - Web-based update
 - Reliable non-commercial distributions include Debian, Slackware
- Many user-installable applications, e.g., OpenOffice, Mozilla
- Some applications also available for Windows and OS X

Examples:
OpenOffice,
Kmail,
Mozilla,
Evolution,
The Gimp,
etc.
KDE,
Gnome
XFree86
GNU
Tools
Linux,
BSD



Examples:
Word,
PowerPoint
Excel,
IE,
Outlook,
etc.
Windows
Windows
DOS,
Windows
DOS,
Windows

Meeting Common Desktop Needs



Many small business desktop needs are now met by reliable, usable open source software, including:

- Desktop
- Word processing, Presentations, Spreadsheets
- Browsing
- Electronic mail
- Calendar
- Address book
- Palm sync
- MS Exchange
- Graphics
- Accounting (Cdn)
- Anti-Virus
- KDE, Gnome
- Open/Star Office, Koffice, Gnome Office, Gnumeric. MS Office also runs on Linux under Crossover Office
- Mozilla/Firebird, Konqueror, Galeon
- Kmail, Evolution, Mozilla/Thunderbird
- Korganizer, Evolution
- Evolution
- J-Pilot, K-Pilot, Gnome-Pilot
- (In development for 2004)
- The Gimp
- (GNUCash, Quanta in development)
- Several choices (protects MS users)



Several popular programs have Linux variants

- Acrobat Reader, Real Player

Some Windows applications run on Linux via WINE &/or Crossover Office

- Microsoft Office, Adobe Photoshop, Lotus Notes, Quicken, Microsoft Visio, eFax Viewer

Networking applications are available through open source's Unix heritage

- Advanced firewall capability
- Samba – printer & file sharing with Windows machines
- Rsync – Align directories on different machines
- X-Window System – Client/server application support
- SSH/SSL – Secure remote linking



Document exchange with dominant non-free applications is extensive and growing

- Word
 - Open/StarOffice does a nice job of translation except for complex reports
- PowerPoint
 - Open/Star Office appears to translate okay
- Excel
 - Open/StarOffice translates simple files. Gnumeric handles complex ones and has more functions. Graph translation a gap
- Outlook
 - Evolution, Kmail, Mozilla/Thunderbird are compatible. In addition, there is Bayesian spam filtering in Kmail & Mozilla
- Exchange
 - An Exchange equivalent is being developed. Evolution and Kmail accept and send email appointments



Document exchange with dominant non-free applications is extensive and growing (continued)

- Internet Explorer
- Mozilla/Konqueror/Galeon: standards-compliant, features incl popup suppression
- Front Page
- OpenOffice and Mozilla create standards-compliant web pages
- Adobe PDF
- Linux Adobe Acrobat reader available. OpenOffice exports to PDF. Ghostview and Kpdf read PDF
- Quicken, MYOB
- Not aware of accounting apps that can import/export to these Windows apps
- MSN Messenger
- Gaim, AMSN are multi-service-compatible (MSN to be incompatible from Oct. 15)
- MapInfo
- GRASS exchanges ARC and MIF files



Some things to watch out for

- Inexperienced users cannot tell the difference from MS and settle in quickly, but experienced users should allow training time (i.e., like going from WordPerfect to Word)
- Completely fresh users should buy pre-packaged CD-ROM sets from e.g., Red Hat, Suse or Mandrake where setup intricacies are hidden, but it will still be necessary to call upon advice at the beginning
- Just as they were with Mac/MS exchanges, there may be slight differences in fonts that must be managed
- Older device driver support, including Winmodem support, has gaps. Likely to improve as share increases
- Gaming applications not as widespread as Windows



Summary

In summary, large businesses will lead the way, but small businesses can consider open source now

- Changing over depends on specific needs and interests
- Small businesses with limited applications and few electronic document interchange needs can consider changing
- In other cases,
 - It is possible to change over many but perhaps not all applications that will be found in a small consultancy
 - There is a learning curve that may be easier for large businesses to absorb than small businesses at this stage of development
 - It may be necessary to keep at least one Windows-based machine on hand for compatibility