

The Big Reason to Open-source Your Desktop

Garrett French

Open-source (free) software is nothing new to the back end of business computing ? chances are good your enterprise runs Linux servers that send email, control print jobs, and serve your company website internally and to customers. These non-proprietary software not only save money but keep hackers at bay. Ask your tech folk what you're running, and, more importantly, why.

Did you know there's an open-source alternative to the proprietary desktop you're running right now? This alternative could save your company a bundle when the new licensing fees hit.

But is open-source software truly a legitimate alternative to Microsoft? Let's take a look around the world.

The Migration to Open-source Desktops

The Korean government recently announced their decision to move 120,000 civil servants over to Linux-based desktop operating systems. They've hired Korean company Hancm to supply and support the move.

The Korean chief of central procurement said their move will bring to us more than 80 percent of cost saving compared to buying exclusive softwares produced by Microsoft.

Largo, Florida employees have, for the past eight years, run Linux KDE desktops, all from one server. David Richards, the systems administrator told Government Computer News a full [Windows] NT shop comparable to ours would require four times more hardware. That would cost a fortune.

Peruvian congressman David Nunez recently wrote a lengthy rebuttal to Microsoft's anti-open-source arguments, thus supporting an upcoming Peruvian bill mandating open-source software for all public offices.

Following 90K dollar licensing fines, guitar and string manufacturer Ernie Ball moved to an all-open-source computer environment. They now use open-source StarOffice on all office computers and receive all their upgrades free from Sun.

A recent study by Australian IT firm Cybersource revealed the most compelling evidence I've found to convince even the most commercial-software entrenched CEO that it's time to move to a Linux desktop. Their white paper calculated the savings a 250 employee company would make if its entire operations migrated to Linux, from server software to the office productivity.

Windows XP Professional version costs US \$299 per registered user. Microsoft Office costs \$479 per user. You've got 250 employees in your enterprise? Get ready to save \$194,500 on software.

You're running a small business with 40 employees? OK. You're looking to save \$31,120. You want a Linux desktop on your home PC? Download KDE, a free operating system, and StarOffice and save yourself a cool \$778.

Is cheaper better?

How can free software work as well as or better than software on which you've spent \$200,000?

You'll have to be the judge of that. Ask your favorite IT person to load a Linux operating system

on to a non-essential computer and go about your daily affairs. Check your hotmail account, look at the news, write a letter. Get a feel for the Linux environment.

Jay Fougere, our resident Linux evangelist, says that moving from the Windows environment to the Linux environment is similar to moving from Windows to Macintosh. They're just different, and will take a bit of getting used to.

The quality and usability of open-source office software is equal to commercial software (ok, so this IS an opinion). The best way to find out is to just try it out for yourself.

Who's Accountable?

You get what you pay for, right? If you download an operating system built by seventeen different programmers from around the world then who're you going to call at seven thirty in the morning when NOTHING WORKS?

Well, you're going to call your CIT, because he already knows and loves all things Linux. He can get that non-proprietary operating system purring again on all the PCs in your enterprise in no time.

If something's really wrong he can just get on the web and solve the problem, and the chances are good that there are other Linux professionals from around the world who have solved the problem already. Realize that when you move to Linux (and not just on your desktop) you're hiring, at no extra charge, the entire Linux programming community.

Flee the Fee

A recent survey by both Gartner and Giga shows that a full one third of Microsoft's biggest customers are not going to accept the new subscription licensing plan. This doesn't mean they'll come knocking on RedHat's door for their operating systems and office productivity software (though I hear the 7.3 version of RedHat includes an email program that's on par with Outlook), though.

But if they did, they sure would save a lot of money.

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