

Tapping FOSS for Business

By MIKHAIL TORRES

The most common misconception about Free and Open Source Software is the primary motivation for using it is because it is FREE. Obviously for small businesses and home users this would probably be the first thing that would attract them to these types of software but have you ever wondered why multi-billion dollar companies like IBM, Sun Microsystems, and Novell have embraced them?

The number one reason would be STABILITY. Open source software are developed by dozens, even hundreds of developers from across the globe—a feat difficult to match by any private software company. This community of programmers and techies not only help design and develop the software but debugs it, points out security issues, and ultimately advocate the application's use. Through this sheer number of software developers with varying backgrounds involved in all stages of development of open source software you are guaranteed of a more stable, secure, and cross-platform application.

A second reason, curiously enough, would be SUPPORT. You'll find that most FOSS projects have loyal and supportive users and are more than willing to help you out when you post your questions on-line. It's also not hard to realize that whatever questions you might have regarding the software, the odds are someone else has asked it before you and the answer is already a Google query away! There may not be one guy or group responsible for your tech support but a community of hundreds



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or even thousands of users willing to help out more than makes up for this.

Finally, one thing the FOSS offers that proprietary software cannot: UNLIMITED CUSTOMIZABILITY. The FOSS community not only allows, but ENCOURAGES its users to customize the software. Some licensed software might provide some sort of module for customization, but FOSS hands you over the source code to tinker with to your heart's content. This gives businesses with particularly unique requirements to simply use a FOSS application as a base from where to start developing custom software specific to what it's looking for. This significantly reduces

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development time and failure rates for custom software projects.

The best way to see what benefits FOSS can give your organization is to simply try them out. It's free after all!

Below are some useful FOSS appli-

cations that any business, big or small, can benefit from:

- Open Office (<http://www.openoffice.org>): The FOSS Community's answer to Microsoft Office.
- Mozilla Firefox and Thunderbird (<http://www.mozilla.org>): The Firefox Web browser is a fraction of the file size of Internet Explorer and is more stable. Thunderbird is an e-mail client designed to rival MS Outlook.
- Asterisk the Open Source PBX (<http://www.asterisk.org>): Our organization's favorite FOSS application at the moment. Asterisk is software that runs in any standard PC running Linux that gives any office a VoIP-based, enterprise-grade PBX System FOR FREE. Have hundreds of extensions running from an old PC!
- SugarCRM (<http://www.sugarforge.org>): This Web-based CRM appli-

cation is as good as any proprietary product you'll see in the market.

- The GIMP (<http://www.gimp.org>): GIMP is a powerful image editing software comparable to Adobe's Photoshop. ●