Open Source on the desktop

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December 2003

Slides for presentation at OSS Watch
conference, 11th December 2003, Oxford.

Open Source is not new

- Free / Public Domain / Shared / Open
- Part of the research/teaching landscape
- Very common on servers
  - Apache, BIND, Samba, Sendmail, Exim
- All my office work since 1987 on OSS
- Pure OSS GUI desktop now possible
  - OpenOffice.org 1.0 in May 2002

We used to call it Public Domain software, but in most cases this was not strictly correct.

People have been sharing things they have written for centuries. Doing the same with software comes naturally: it is part of the creative commons.

I typeset my PhD thesis on a Xerox Documenter – a very closed system. Almost every document I have created since then has been done with open source products.

The only really new thing is good open source GUI office software.

Promoting the OSS desktop

- netproject
  - www.netproject.com
  - Education and consultancy
  - SODA
  - EU work: IDA OSS Migration Guidelines
  - UK Police forces
  - UK Local Government
    - London Borough of Newham in the news

netproject is run by Eddie Bleasdale, uses several consultants well-known in the Unix community.

Much of its work is based around open source

We delivered the IDA Guidelines in September, and there were 90000 downloads in the first month. Now available in English and French, with others on the way.

London Borough of Newham in the news recently as MS tries to stop it opting for OSS solutions. netproject heavily involved here, with demo systems and reports.

Desktop Issues

- GUI familiarity
  - Good: Gnome and KDE both easy to learn
- File format compatibility
  - Good for common MS Office formats
- Groupware
  - Patchy: group calendars are an issue
- Toys
  - Just different!

Gnome and KDE no harder than moving from Win98 to XP

Word, Excel, Powerpoint all handled well. WordPerfect not yet.

Plenty of web-based groupware, but little client-server yet. Evolution can access Exchange2000 via (cost) plugin.

Scanners, cameras, PDAs, gadgets: many supported but manufacturers do not usually supply Linux drivers so have to find OSS equiv.

Management Issues 1

- Licensing
  - No problem!
  - Some managers need educating/reassuring
- Software support
  - Range of options
  - Prices from zero upwards
- Personnel
  - Training
  - Fear of change / CV dilution

No need to track licences or pay for them. Almost no licence issues if not developing own s/w.

Nobody to sue if it goes wrong – but who has ever sued Microsoft anyway?

Linux will not go away, whatever FUD is spread by SCO and similar.

Distributors provide support services e.g. RedHat basic $179/yr, std $299/yr, SuSE w/s £66/yr or choose community distro e.g.Debian – free.

User training can be short: perhaps 2 days. Admin training needs more time: several weeks spread over a year or so.

Management Issues 2

- Installation
  - Should include automatic inventory update
- Updating software
  - Automated "pull"
- Configuration management
- Per-user configuration issues
- Transition and co-existence

Bare-metal install must be automatic: no technical choices to be made by installer. Capture inventory data at this time too.

Use a scalable "pull" system for s/w updates and config management. Sign everything with public-key crypto.

Per-user config needs work: much Linux s/w is aimed at geek market where users *want* to hand-configure. In managed environment may have to prevent them doing so.

Can run mixed proprietary/OSS system, but it is harder than doing a cutover transition. See IDA doc.

SODA

- Secure Open Desktop Architecture
- netproject development effort
  - Open Source
  - Scale from 10 to 100k desktops
  - Central management
  - Automated software & configuration update
  - Good security
  - Most components already exist

SODA project aims to integrate and package a set of management tools to run a large IT service. Target users are office/admin people, but could be used for a wider range with some reduction in security.

SODA To Do list

- Build management infrastructure
- Build tools for routine admin
- Fix application configuration process
  - Gnome
  - Evolution
  - OpenOffice.org
- Shared calendars for groupware

Conclusions

- Open Source desktop *usable* now
- Some apps hard to manage in large scale
- Transition from proprietary systems needs careful planning but is quite possible
- Benefits of openness and cost

Further reading

- www.netproject.com
- IDA Open Source Migration Guidelines
- www.opensource.org
- www.cluetrain.org

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