



What is Open Source software?

Open Source Software

Open source software offers great benefits to the small business. Good use of the right open source software provides enhanced ICT capabilities at lower software costs. Open source software is freely available from the internet; anyone can access the software without paying license or maintenance charges.

Who uses open source software?

The use of open source is growing; five years ago it was a playground for enthusiasts, however recent estimates indicate that 25% of servers now run an open source operating system (Linux). Over half the websites in the world are powered by open source software, and several governments in Europe and the Americas are considering large deployments of open source software.

Where does open source software come from?

The best open source software is developed by software professionals, sometimes working full time in larger companies, sometimes part time for the love of the work. Well-known companies like IBM, Novell, Sun and Apple have invested heavily in open source software development. While it is true that anyone can participate in most open source projects, the good projects are managed by professionals who only accept professional quality code.

What open source software is available?

There are open source applications covering the majority of the needs of a small business, including:

- Desktop software – Firefox, OpenOffice and Thunderbird
- Server software – powered by Linux
- Customer relationship management (CRM) applications – vTiger and SugarCRM
- Databases – MySQL and PostgreSQL
- Website content management applications – Joomla, PostNuke, Mambo and Plone
- Telephony – Asterisk

Can open source software be used with Microsoft Windows?

Yes.



What's the difference between open source software and shareware/freeware?

Unlike shareware and freeware, the source code for open source software is freely available (hence the name). Programmers can review the source code and fix bugs or add features and then redistribute it. With all those people checking it, it is less likely to contain defects than many commercial packages, hence less susceptible to attack by hackers.

How do open source developers pay their mortgages?

Some people develop open source applications for the kudos - the bragging rights for having solved a difficult problem. There is now a strong community of such developers.

A growing number of organisations have developed business models based on supporting open source. For example, they charge for services to install and manage systems, but give away the base software for free. Giving it away for free can create a larger installed base for their services, hence increasing their overall revenues.

Many software products are now commodities. For example, most organisations' need for websites and databases can be met by standard products, and many don't need the bells and whistles that come with the expensive, high-end packages. For such commodity software, the cost of maintaining the software can be higher than the revenue a vendor might get from selling new versions of it (especially when the cost of employing a large sales and marketing team is considered). In these cases, it can be a better business model to eliminate the maintenance costs by opening up the source code for a committed community of developers to maintain and develop, and then to generate revenue by delivering value-added services.

Where should you go next?

If you'd like to take advantage of open source software, there are a few key questions that you'll need to answer:

- Does the right open source software exist for your business?
- Where can you get support?
- What are the cost implications of implementing an open source solution?
- What will be the return on investment?

Answering these questions is not always easy, but [The National Business to Business Centre](#), in association with [OpenAdvantage](#) can help. Focussed on the needs of the small business, the NB2BC can show you where open source will be of maximum benefit, identify appropriate software & support and guide you



The National B2B Centre
Helping growing businesses make smart e-business decisions

through the implementation. Software licence costs need no longer be a barrier to the growth of your ICT capabilities.

By Martin King-Turner, NB2BC Director, August 2005

Source: Adapted from "The SME Guide to Open Source" by Dr. Graham Oakes:
<http://www.ebcvg.com/articles.php?id=784>, and "7 Basic Truths about Open Source" by Maria Winslow:
<http://virtuas.com/osl-7bt-01.pdf>