Software Freedom

Affordable Desktop Alternatives for Non-Profit Organizations

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Software Freedom: Affordable Desktop Alternatives for Non-Profit Organizations

Introduction

Non-Profit decision makers are constantly challenged to make critical business decisions on very limited budgets. Technology, seen as an extravagant expense, often gets the bottom priority. Organizations must "make do" with what computer systems they already have, often years out of date and suffering from poor performance. A few organizations are lucky enough to have full-time dedicated IT personnel, but most organizations must also "make do" by depending on computer savvy staff or volunteers for technical support. While the impacts to office productivity affect the organization's ability to serve its target community, purchasing new software and upgrading hardware and hiring dedicated IT staff are simply outside of the available funds. Fortunately, community-driven software solutions exist that can provide a user-friendly computing platform and office productivity tools for a price that fits within any NPO's budget – free. This white paper will explore the advantages of free open-source software solutions for Non-Profit Organizations.

The Real Cost of Productivity

Computer technology is vital for efficiency and productivity in any office setting. Non-Profit organizations face unique challenges in the face of staying current.

The Cost of Proprietary Software

Non-profits need computer software in order to better serve their communities. Software is typically acquired from donations or is purchased from money awarded in grants. Once an organization is dependent on a specific software brand, the organization must purchase additional licenses for any new computer systems they wish to add. Typically licenses are priced to target for-profit business, not non-profit. However, even with rare non-profit discounts the cost to upgrade is still prohibitive for most NPO's. The cost of upgrading can especially be shocking to organizations whose software was initially donated.

The Cost of Computer Hardware

Organizations need computer hardware to run computer software. Most organizations have limited IT expertise and must depend on expensive prebuilt systems. When upgrading to new software, organizations typically purchase entire new computer systems to replace the old ones. Furthermore, proprietary software needs newer hardware than what most NPO's possess in order to run efficiently.

Purchasing new licenses and new hardware each time an organization wants to upgrade is not cost-effective. Because many organizations are unable to cover this expense, systems are not upgraded and Non-Profit organizations are unable to keep their technology current. Organization expansion is limited and technology resources are stretched thin.

The Cost of IT Expertise

To further add to the problem, NPO's do not typically have dedicated IT support staff they can depend on to see them through technology upgrades. NPO's are unable to match the competitive pay IT professionals receive at for-profit organizations. NPO's depend on staff or volunteers who may be computer savvy to perform computer support tasks in their spare time. For larger projects, organizations either hire external vendors or work with the proprietary software company directly, none of which have the NPO's best interests in mind.

Key Technology Challenges for Non Profit Organizations

- Software licensing is expensive
- Software upgrades require frequent, expensive hardware upgrades
- No dedicated IT support staff

In the face of these challenges, many Non-Profit Organizations are considering free alternatives to proprietary software.

What is Free Open-Source Software?

Free, open-source software (FOSS) is liberally licensed to grant users the following freedoms:

- Use of the software for any purpose
- Modification of the software
- Redistribution of the software

Organizations dependent on proprietary software might be hesitant to consider a switch to something unfamiliar. Free software typically has the same commonly used features as proprietary alternatives and most organizations are able to get up to speed quickly. In fact, free software applications like Open Office are just as productive as equivalent proprietary software applications.[1] The cost benefits of not having to pay for software licenses and hardware upgrades make free, open-source software worthy of consideration.

Criteria for the decision in favor of Open Source software on desktops

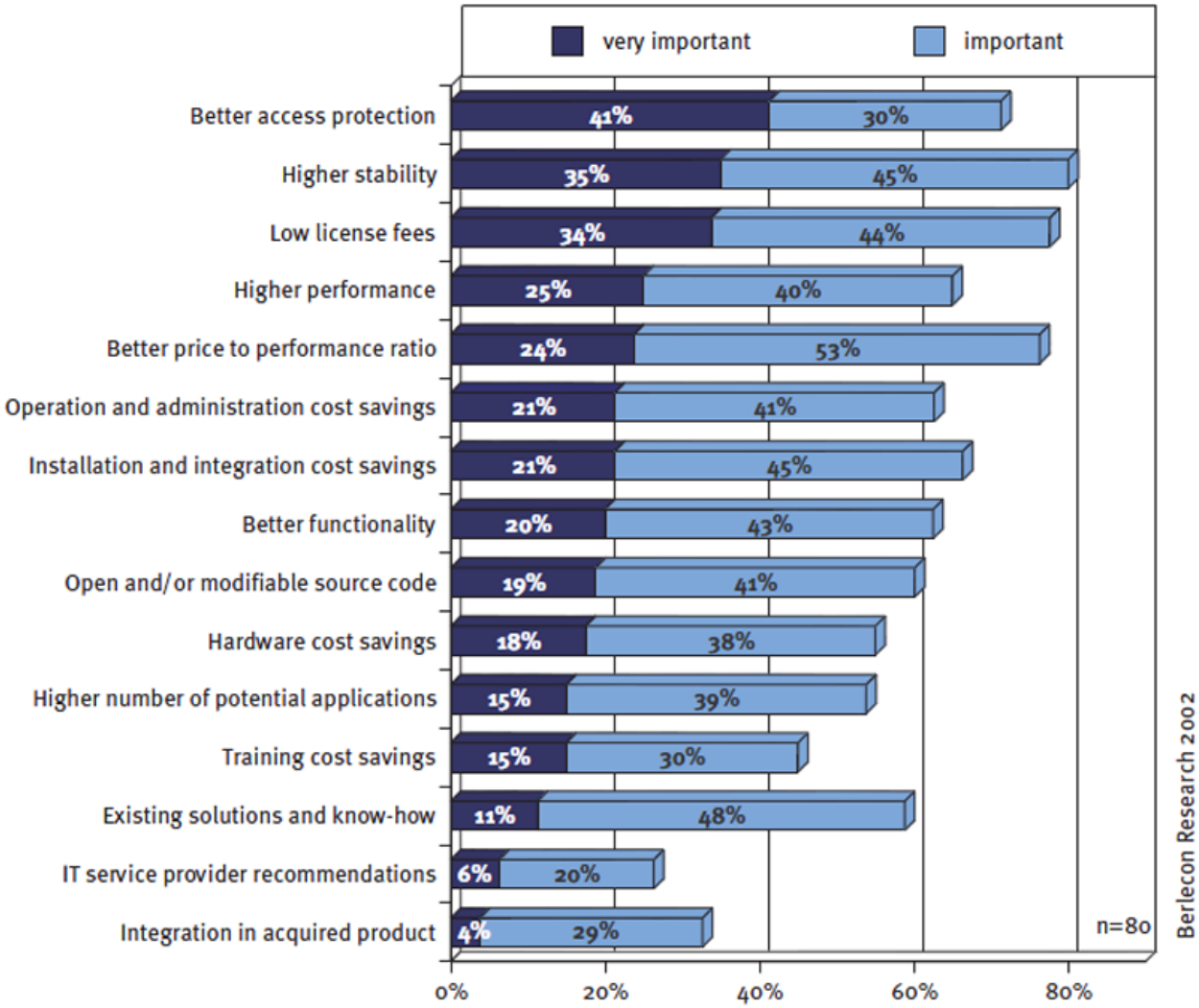

Figure 1: Criteria for organizations switching to a FOSS desktop platform.

[1] (Claborn, 2007, January 17)

Focus Your Funding

Organizations who switched to the FOSS model reported that monetary savings were the key criteria for making the switch.

FOSS saves your organization money in the following ways:

- No licensing fees to pay
- Runs on a broader (and older) range of hardware
- Does not require full time IT staff

According to a report by Berlecon, low or zero license fees was one of the most important factors in an organization's decision to switch to free, open-source software. Another important factor was the indirect savings realized through daily operations, administration, and support.[2]

Where proprietary software requires a complex licensing structure, including additional licenses for each additional installation of the application, open-source software is simple. You don't need to purchase additional licenses to install the software on new computers.

Free, open-source software runs on a wider range of hardware and does not require constant, expensive upgrades. Rather than purchasing new hardware, organizations can repurpose old hardware. If an organization has purchased new hardware, free, open-source software will run more efficiently on it than proprietary alternatives. With more time in between hardware upgrades, organizations can focus funding on other areas that are in line with the Non-Profit Organization's goals.

With FOSS, you can focus your funding on benefitting your organization, not on contributing to proprietary software profits.

[2] (Berlecon Research, 2002)

Make the Switch to Free Software

Linux, the most popular free, open-source operating system, is available in a variety of distributions. Some are backed by companies that ensure development is focused on a timeline, while others are entirely community maintained and supported. Some Linux distributions are entirely free to run while others follow the proprietary software model of requiring licensing fees coupled with support contracts.

Unlike proprietary operating systems, the most user-friendly Linux distributions come bundled with free software applications. Linux distributions backed by a company that provides technical support can offer assistance in determining the best fit for your organization, and should offer support on any applications as well.

A technical support contract is an affordable alternative to hiring a fulltime IT expert. Paying for technical support can be cheaper than hiring a fulltime IT person, especially if companies offer special pricing for NPO's.

Choosing the right Linux distribution for your organization can be challenging, especially for NPO decision-makers who are more focused on running their organization than on keeping up with the latest technology trends. Organizations can consider a hybrid solution if a small number of staff require proprietary software for a specific function.

Choose a Linux Distribution that is…

- ✓ Free to download and install
- ✓ Easy to use
- ✓ Installed with free office productivity applications
- ✓ Backed by a company that offers technical support

Non-profit organizations with limited IT resources should consider a user-friendly Linux distribution that is company-backed, costs nothing, and offers technical support.

Ubuntu is the User Friendly Solution

Ubuntu is a user-friendly Linux distribution backed by Canonical. Tasks which often take a lower priority with other Linux distributions, such as documentation and translation, are a top priority in Ubuntu development. Within less than two years of its release in 2004, Ubuntu became one of the most used Linux distributions among private users.[3]

Ubuntu installations include Open Office, Firefox, and Evolution, as well as several other useful applications. Ubuntu provides an easy system for managing installed applications that rivals the most popular proprietary operating systems.

Ubuntu is free to download and install and does not require special licensing. Potential users can give Ubuntu a test drive and ensure hardware compatibility without installing it. Once Ubuntu has been downloaded and burned to a CD, you can boot from the CD to run a basic Ubuntu installation without affecting your computer.

Ubuntu Features

- ✓ One of the most user-friendly Linux distributions
- ✓ Free to download and install
- ✓ Includes applications like Open Office, Firefox, and Evolution.
- ✓ Backed by Canonical
- ✓ Technical Support available

[3] (FLOSS-POLS, 2006, March)

No IT Staff Necessary

Because not every organization has the luxury of a full time IT staff, Canonical offers comprehensive and affordable technical support options.

Canonical is committed to supporting Ubuntu users so that they can benefit from the advantages of using open source software, quickly and easily. Canonical provides both telephone and online support so you are assured of live assistance from our team of support analysts, who really take the time to help you. Your issues will be dealt with by a knowledgeable, passionate Linux enthusiast with years of experience in giving users quality support.

Ubuntu Technical Support Features

- Comprehensive options to meet your organization's needs
- Timely response to both critical and non-critical issues
- Unlimited support calls that cover both specific incidents and planning

Canonical offers varying levels of support depending on your organizations needs, from basic desktop assistance to full Windows network integration. In addition, Canonical is sensitive to the special financial requirements of Non-Profit Organizations.

Starter Desktop Service

The Starter Desktop Service is ideal if you are just getting started with Ubuntu Desktop Edition. It gives you basic help with installing, configuring and using it. New Ubuntu users will also get help with exploring and using the Ubuntu desktop environment with confidence, safe in the knowledge that the Canonical team is available to help.

Advanced Desktop Service

The Advanced Desktop Service is aimed at experienced users who use a wide range of features and applications. We will help you with advanced installations, as well as provide support for a wide range of applications and help with managing your system. With Advanced support you can easily access Canonical's expert team whenever you encounter any problems.

Professional Desktop Service

The Professional support service for Ubuntu Desktop Edition is for professional users who use Ubuntu as their main computing environment. Our technical consultants will help you with advanced installations such as through the network, as well as the full range of applications and advanced productivity features that a professional user needs. Additionally, this level of support includes help with expert administration features such as access to Microsoft Windows networks and using desktop virtualization.

Find Out More

Contact Canonical Support Sales to find out if Ubuntu is the best fit for your organization.

+1-877-226-6642

http://www.ubuntu.com/support/services

Download Ubuntu for free from http://www.ubuntu.com and burn it to a CD. Boot directly from the CD to explore Ubuntu.

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Criteria for organizations switching to a FOSS desktop platform. _____ *4*

Works Cited

Berlecon Research. (2002). *FLOSS I: Use of Open Source Software in Firms and Public Institutions.*

Claborn, T. (2007, January 17). *Study Finds Open Source Benefits Business.* InformationWeek.

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