Open Source : Software In The Public Interest ?

Speaker

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Open Source: Software In The Public Interest ?

? ## What Is It ?

- ? Software for which the source code is freely available for modification and distribution.

- ? In "Business Terms", it is software with an Escrow Agreement which is invoked at the *start of the contract.*

- ? *Often available free of charge or for a nominal fee, but not necessarily always.*

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? Who *Supports It ?*

   ? *Often supported by distributed teams of developers with a project leader.*
     (e.g. Linux is headed by Linus Torvalds)

   ? *Increasingly supported by "Traditional" companies :*

      ? *IBM have invested over US$1bn*

      ? *Oracle list Linux as a supported platform*

   ? *Supported by "Linux Companies"*

      ? *SuSE Linux, RedHat among others.*

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? *Issues*

  ? *Open Source typically uses a "point" release system.*

    ? *Any release less than 1.0 is considered early development*

      ? *May work for many, but not for all !*

    ? *Releases greater than 1.0 are typically stable, but not always.*

      ? *Linux uses "even" numbers as stable, "odd" as development. (e.g. Kernel 2.4.20 is "stable" but kernel "2.5.20" is development)*

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- *Issues*

  - *Not every project makes it*

    - *Some are abandoned or develop too slowly to be useful.*

  - *Not every project is aimed at end-users*

    - *Some are developed as purely technical tools, despite having potential to be great business or end-user tools.*

  - *Some Open Source licenses preclude or restrict certain uses*

    - *Selling an Open Source program is often allowed, but compliance with the license requires simultaneous release of source code – a process often misunderstood by those familiar with traditional software approaches.*

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? ## *What Does It Achieve ?*

? ### *High stability and reliability*

? #### *Reduces downtime – which reduces user frustrations*

? #### *Often reduces support costs – leading to financial savings*

? ### *Implements Innovative Designs And Ideas*

? #### *Development teams often highly technical and a driven by implementing new ideas of improving on existing ones.*

? ### *Provides Platform Flexibility And Independance*

? #### *Systems often developed to work identically on multiple Unix, Linux and Windows flavours.*

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? *Recent Example*

? *Distribution of video message from Chief Constable*

? *Traditional method involves costly duplication of tapes and rescheduling of officer duties in order to view the message.*

? *Alternatively, the VideoLAN project allows the message to be captured (using transcode) and multicast on the LAN to all computers. Officers view the message using the VideoLAN Client at a convenient time.*

? *No requirement to duplicate tapes or to re-schedule duties, leading to officers maximising their time on front-line duties and cost savings in distribution of the video.*

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- *Recent Example*
  - *Distribution of video message from Chief Constable*
    - *System now available to transmit live CCTV footage and off-air broadcasts during major incidents to any incident control room with a computer terminal.*
    - *All components used are Open Source.*
  - *Other examples share common themes :*
    - *Increase flexibility of systems, especially avoiding "Lock-In"*
    - *Reduced cost of implementing a given system or feature.*
    - *Availability of source code gives business continuity protections as per traditional Escrow without additional expenditure.*

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The Future

- *UK Government and European Commission both sanction Open Source*

- *Increasing international Governments actually encouraging Open Source*

- *Businesses can profit from Open Source*
  - *Clients need and want the service of installing and configuring systems and continued support.*
  - *Contribution to the Open Source development process can harness talent unavailable from any other route.*
    - *Sun Microsystems StarOffice product relies upon the OpenOffice development project.*