

## **FOSS in Large Organisations: how the corporate world benefits from Open Source software.**

Ok, hello, let's start with some context, please show me hands for the following:

- Who knows about open source already?
- Who uses it?
- Who knows about Linux?
- Apache?
- Perl, PHP or Java?
- Samba?
- Firefox?
- Open Office? Chris will talk about that later and we'll show you...

Until 2003, I worked for the systems engineering group in Salomon Brothers (later Salomon Smith Barney, later Citigroup at the time I left). My recent freelance work includes BBC new media and Warner Studios.

These organisations all use open source software. Indeed in the sad, neglected and somewhat impoverished corner of the borough called Canary Wharf, according to my banking friends, it's in fine shape.

To answer the hands-up questions, here are the answers:

Linux	Operating system that can be used as an alternative to Windows as a desktop or server  <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linux">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linux</a>
Apache	Serves web content for about 66% of the visible web  <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apache_HTTP_Server">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apache_HTTP_Server</a>

Perl, PHP or Java	General purpose programming languages <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perl">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perl</a> <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Php">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Php</a> <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Java_(programming_language)">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Java (programming language)</a>
Samba	Makes file store on Linus available to Windows machines <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samba_(software)">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samba (software)</a>
Firefox	Web Browser <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firefox">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Firefox</a>
OpenOffice	Office suite with a good level of compatibility to Microsoft Office <a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OpenOffice">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open Office</a>

These are all open source tool, both free (as in speech) and free (as in lunch), you can go home tonight and download any of them, the police won't come, the Business Software Alliance won't come.

Why do big, serious, (sometimes) efficient and wealthy organisations use these tools? How can something that is free (in the intellectual sense) and often in the financial sense be valuable and useful? After all, you get what you pay for, all this is hippy-dippy nonsense isn't it? The quality must be bad and support costs just be terrible?

Here's a big article from Information that shows how things were already moving over three years ago:

[http://www.informationweek.com/news/software/open\\_source/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=171200352](http://www.informationweek.com/news/software/open_source/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=171200352)

Here are some of the reasons that we applied at Salomon Brothers:

- Low transaction cost, we can experiment with many tools that may save weeks or months of development
- The licencing environment (for in house use, less so when republishing software) is simple, software can be deployed, removed in many copies on different classes of system without involving a salesman
- 'Intelligent crowd' big open source projects tend to produce bug fixes and workarounds quite quickly. Why you can do this yourself! No more, waiting for the vendor
- The program code is there, so you can fix things and (more important in a 'rich' varied environment) interface things because there's no a lot proprietary interfacing going on
- Any interaction with the community (usually) enriches the software, there's a certain human satisfaction in that
- And lastly, many of these products are free, but for a wealthy organisation that's not a problem, free and lousy, I guarantee they wouldn't spend another second looking

I've probably used my five or ten minutes now, but I don't need to draw a picture about how this approach can benefit, non-commercial, non-profits both in terms of increased skills and productivity and using money for primary-purpose rather than expensive IT infrastructure.

So, a lot of big wealthy, IT savvy organisations use open source. Indeed, if you use Firefox, you do too. So there must be something, apart from snake oil, in it, mustn't there? This just in from the London Stock Exchange:

[http://linux.slashdot.org/story/09/10/06/1742203/London-Stock-Exchange-Rejects-NET-For-Open-Source?art\\_pos=6](http://linux.slashdot.org/story/09/10/06/1742203/London-Stock-Exchange-Rejects-NET-For-Open-Source?art_pos=6)

**Comments, questions.**