# LINUX SOFTWARE IS COOL, LINUX IS EDGY, LINUX IS FREE

Linux can save your business money. Powerful Linux applications power servers, desktops and laptops across enterprises and small businesses each day. Here in our business, our websites are open source, our support module is Linux, the CRM application and the Accounting system we use to run our business is open source software. Best of all our Linux tools, operating systems and applications, are all freely distributed.

Linux people are different. They search for power and function, but that is not all sought. Linux people believe that software should be freely distributed. The Linux community respects Microsoft; fantastic company whose apps like Office have improve millions of lives, really cool. But the dark secret in Linux circles paints Microsoft as a dinosaur, Linux people believe that expensive software with painful upgrade fees is headed for trouble.

Bill Gates Sees a "Sea Change" in Application Software

Microsoft sells operating systems and applications, and keeps on selling them. Backward compatibility with applications like Word can be hard and is this pain is by design. Microsoft wants to create pain and then fix, with upgrades. Microsoft wants upgrade dollars. This software model is starting to collect some rust. And the reason for this: free software is good. Free software is now available; free business applications to run your business, which are maintained, supported and best of all, are freely distributed. Bill Gates's vision has focused on the on-line delivery model and even the free application delivery model. Please read his on-line business application comments right here.

Linux Distributions are a Personal Choice

Linux is built in distributions or releases, all slightly different. Ubuntu, a terrific linux distribution, is so good that it may be nudging Windows off desktops. Ubuntu is easy to deploy and easy to use plus it is loaded with applications for home users and business users. The Ubuntu desktop market share numbers are still viewed with a magnifying glass, but not too long ago, you needed a microscope. Ubuntu is easy to install and easy to use. Just get the software at the website and burn a CD. Ubuntu has just one CD or one ISO which loads in a snap. Red Hat, another distribution has 6 and takes much longer to complete. Ubuntu is lean because after the initial setup the user can craft his Ubuntu system just how he likes. The internet has Ubuntu distribution sites that power a tool called apt-get. All you do is apt-get install from a command line or user the Add Software GUI tools and you are getting the best linux apps right off the shelf and put right into your menu.

Ubuntu Distribution

The Ubuntu distribution has an Office suite with word processing, a spreadsheet, and presentation modules. All work can be saved in common formats like .doc or xls and are completely compatible with Microsoft products. The base Ubuntu application is loaded with graphics applications, CD, DVD burning and creation, multi-media including music and movie players, back-up apps, powerful anti-virus tools and networking applications that are best of breed. There is built in VOIP and message clients and many cool apps like Sticky Notes to make you more efficient.

Free Business Linux Applications

GNU Cash, free financial tracking, similar to Quicken. Cut an invoice, track bank accounts, run a budget and report your cash flow. Import your bank files and create buckets of spend for your financial analysis that will make an accountant jealous.

PBX and Phone Systems

Elastix will power up your phones. Did you know that most PBX commercial software is run using a freely distributed tool called Astericks. Elastix has re-packaged Astericks to ease the deployment and offers support. Expensive PBXs are not necessary. Linux has adapted other telephony tools like VOIP, predictive dialers, and call center solutions.

Do you need a content management system? A website or an intranet for your company. Plone, Drupal, Joomla deliver big. The functionality in these freely distributed tools match the priciest CMS software. The tools are supported and you can even buy how to books at your local bookstore.

Customer Relationship Management and CRM

How about sales tools, CRM or order management, even inventory management software?. Full power CRM or customer relationship management tools are available for free or for super low prices. DataForceCRM, based in Dallas, is deploying a sugarcrm linux derivative that has been enhanced and strengthened and customers are shaving 80% off typical user fees. DataForceCRM offers wikis, forums, full documentation and will make sure user adoption is high. The tool is super flexible, has Outlook integration, manages marketing, tracks sales, eyeballs inventory, push button order management, gives customers's a support tool and is Freely distributed to companies with less than 10 users.  If your business has over 10 users, prices are still a bargain.

Companies pay high prices for customer support modules. OTRS, another open source backbone application in commercial applications, is there for the download and configuration. After set up your business will have a fully featured, professional trouble ticket tracker helping your clients get what they need.

Virtualization is taking IT departments by storm. Virtualization turns your single computer, you need some memory, into many virtual machines. This streamlines hardware usage and turns hard ware utilization way up. State of the art Virtualization called Xen comes with many linux distributions. In Ubuntu do apt-get install vmware-server and a fine tool is on its way to your machine.

The coolest thing about Linux is that in the 30 minutes I took to write this article, more applications were probably released. Sourceforge.net, a depository for linux tools is one of the busiest sites on the internet and full of Linux value added applications. Just yesterday I needed to edit a PDF. I google up pdfnet and there I went, for free. Very cool, ERP, or enterprise resource planning is free too. Linux support was targeted for genius level IQs but not any longer.

Conclusion

Companies realize good training and support drives value. Applications, even if free, are expensive if the learning curve is steep and if users are not guide. Smart open source companies are rolling out support modules to all service all learning types, wikis, live chat, forums, documentation and live phone contacts. Now with support in place, training available communities grow and grow. The applications I mentioned hit the tipping point where the user community is user support. Just this morning I was stumped with a virtual machine question. I googled the error code and added for Ubuntu. The page came up faster than I could call support, and the answer was clearly defined. Cool.

New technology can be daunting to learn and use. The linux world knows this and just in the last few years, has put strong arms around user friendliness. Opensource software is easy to deploy, easy to use, powerful and supported. I just covered a tiny fraction of applications available today. Just for fun, visit the sites in this article. Check out the super cool applications and then put a number to your potential savings. You may become a Linux Geek.