

How Open Source software works for me

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I joined TBCS when it was still called the PC Users Group and met Doc, Chuck Oppermann, John Beach and others. I was a happy user of Chuck's Dreamland Express BBS. I worked in Windows support & training for 25 years. My personal computers included CP/M, DOS, Apple, Novell, OS2, Windows and Linux.

Linux just had its 20th birthday. For more than 15 years ago I've been playing with Linux at home using old hardware. I also joined SLUG and learned from them. When I retired I went to using Linux exclusively on my home network.

There are only two types of software:

1. closed source such as Microsoft, Adobe or Apple. This is expensive software to design and market and lots of up-front dollars are invested getting the product out the door. Regular updates insure a steady flow of money back to the closed source vendor.
2. open source such as Firefox, Open Office, Apache or Joomla. This software is designed by groups of individuals seeking personal recognition or companies that take an open source product under their wings. This software goes through many steps of peer review and is finally released as some form of open source. It is freely available for download at no cost to the user. Updates are ongoing and released at no cost.

The terms "free software" and "copyright" do not accurately describe the distinctions above. Some closed source software is free such as Adobe Acrobat Reader or Skype and some open source software carries a copyright (or copyleft). It is best to always use closed and open source descriptors.

As computer users we have several sources of software.

In pre-Internet times we often had excellent bundled software included with our hardware purchase such as Wordstar, etc. We could purchase limited software at local stores or order from magazines but one of the biggest sources was "*getting it from a friend.*" Some freeware was available on local BBS's such as Real Player.

In the Internet era we have even more bundled software on purchased computers. We can choose software from local stores or downloading over the net. Some choices include open source software items with various licenses. We can't share closed source software with friends since the big companies watch to see we don't cheat them of money.

At this crossover time 20-15 years ago, five huge developments took place behind the scenes that impact open source software through today:

1. Richard Stallman set up the Free Software Assn. He explained two kinds of free – free beer and freedom to use, change and reissue software. This group is active today campaigning against closed source software.
2. Berkley software development established the BSD kernel based closely on UNIX. BSD is still updated and used today.
3. Linus Torvalds was able to design a Linux kernel. He did this by asking help through email and the completed product unlike the two above was a collaborative worldwide effort.
4. Steve Jobs solidified the Mac design so popular today.
5. Bill Gates & Microsoft ruled desktop computing with closed source DOS and Windows.

Learn more of these events by watching the documentary movie "*RevolutionOS*" or reading "*The Cathedral and the Bazaar*" a book by Eric Raymond (now a free download).

The open source software I currently use with Linux includes:

- Mint - Linux OS
- * Firefox – browser and plugins
- * Thunderbird - email client
- * Open Office - now Libre Office
- * VLC - media player
- * Audacity - audio recording
- * Gimp - Graphic Editor (Photoshop clone?)
- * DIA - Diagram editor like VISIO
- * Kompozer - html editor
- * Chromium – browser (not Chrome)
- Remmina - VNC Tool
- Transmission - torent tool
- * K3B - disk burning tool
- Wine - to run some Windows programs

Note: the ten titles with a * are also available for Windows users

My presentation was prompted by the June TBCS monthly presentation containing flames about Open Office saying "*it sucks.*" First off, this is not nice talk and hardly true. The presenter was and is a friend and former Microsoft employee: Chuck Oppermann.

I began the FOSS SIG more than four years ago as a personal quest to encourage members to use the zero cost software I've been using for years. In the DOS days we called it shareware or free-ware. Some of this software is copyrighted and others are in various degrees of open source.

Formerly I was a Microsoft hater but that is past. For twenty plus years my income came supporting Windows networks with hundreds of proprietary software licenses including Microsoft Office. I knew MS Office well and coached people to use it effectively. In a school environment software licensing costs are drastically discounted and were well within our budget.

Costs increase dramatically on the street. I see friends and members invest big dollars into software where they use a fraction of its potential. This includes the latest Windows, PhotoShop, Acrobat and MS Office to name a few. Too often, the investment in software exceeds the cost of the hardware on which it is installed. Consider also ongoing update costs that continue for the life of the product.

Open Office (which has recently been updated and renamed Libre Office) is an open source gem. It mimics all the Microsoft Office applications and is an ideal choice for home users. It reads and writes to old and new Microsoft formats and can be downloaded and installed for no cost. No registration is required. You can make a copy of the download to give to your friends. I'd also suggest the training curve is very short compared to newer versions of MS Office. There are unique OO features such as one-click exports to PDF files, equal OO versions for Mac, Linux and Windows, and

OpenOffice SUCKS



default file saving in universal ODF (open doc formats).

Is OO the equivalent of MS Office? Probably not but I wouldn't know. For more than five years all my office work has been accomplished using OO. I use "Write" (the word processor), "Calc" (the spreadsheet) and "Base" (the database) to manage a non-profit business and things for home. I make club presentations using "Impress" (OO's PowerPoint clone) saving files in .ppt format. All the above I edit and easily move between Windows and Linux computers.

In my opinion for TBCS members and Joe and Sally HomeUser, OO will more than meet their need (heck if you only write one Christmas letter once a year even WordPad will do). Save Office upgrade costs and buy yourself a new PC. **OpenOffice / LibreOffice hardly sucks!**

In open source, free does not mean inferior quality! I've found user support to be much better. Most sites have FAQs, support forums and email support. Replies are often overnight and intelligent.

"Open Source in its true form as defined by the Open Source definition is not a sin as some might believe, it is a blessing. It tells users and companies that they won't be locked into it and that there is a community behind the software."

Sean Michael Kerner, June 30, 2011

TBCS has two SIGs to support open source software:

- The FOSS SIG meets the last Thursday of each month from 1:00 – 3:00 pm.
- The Linux SIG meets the third Monday of each month from 7:00 – 9:00 pm.

We welcome new people to attend and ask questions. We'll try to help you find free and open source tools and attempt to help with hardware and software issues.

- Our website at <http://fosssig.com>



Finally we must consider: In the long-run will all this matter?

Is the day of the desktop and notebook computer becoming obsolete?

Will we soon find all our computer applications in the cloud?

Will we do our computing with smart-phones and inexpensive Android tablets? Or will we need iPads or WindowsPads? And since the web is built on HTML5, will the hardware and operating system actually make any difference?