



Speech - Open Source Software Seminar

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Address to Open Source Software Seminar

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Speaking notes for Mr John Rimmer, CEO, NOIE

Introduction

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and I would like to welcome you to what should be a stimulating and informative seminar.

The issue of Open Source Software versus proprietary software polarises people - at the extreme ends of the spectrum it attracts proponents filled with almost religious commitment either a reformation movement or a counter-reformation.

The OSS movement has been in existence for some time, but it has grown significantly over recent years.

As you would be aware OSS presents a fundamental challenge to the traditional proprietary way of developing, maintaining and marketing software.

There are a number of different perspectives on OSS, and several are represented here today.

The original OSS community had a not-for-profit ethos and was concerned to share intellectual property.

The more recent involvement of major vendors in the movement has added another chapter, and raises the interesting issue of how the original OSS philosophy can be accommodated to commercial imperatives.

Then of course, there is the perspective of those in the commercial, proprietary software development model.

While we expect vigorous debate to result from these differing perspectives at this seminar today, what we are aiming for today is a rational, factual discussion to inform hard headed CIOs who will not be swayed by enthusiasms.

Issues surrounding OSS

The social and economic implications of the open source movement are of absorbing interest, and I am sure that the presenters will touch on some of these aspects.

However, there are a range of immediate practical issues involved in implementing OSS which interest us as professional in the industry too.

There has been debate in the media recently about a range of these issues.

The upfront costs of implementing OSS as opposed to the total cost of ownership of OSS, for instance, has been the subject of discussion.

The issue of security is of paramount importance, these days, too, and there has been debate about the advantages of OSS from this point of view.

The intellectual property issues and impacts of OSS on innovation is another issue that has been the subject of claim and counter-claim.

And there has been speculation about the policy stance of governments, domestically and internationally with regard to OSS, particularly when there is a suggestion that OSS is to be mandated.

Like other ICT users, governments around the world are interested in OSS and the opportunities claimed to bring about greater competition in the software market, expand options, and reduce costs and risks.

Many are also interested in the opportunities it provides for domestic ICT businesses – including small-to-medium enterprises – in areas such as supply, implementation assistance, training and consulting.

Of course, what is an opportunity for some may represent a threat to others.

But innovation and choice is critical to driving a dynamic, competitive, marketplace.

Why NOIE is holding this seminar

NOIE decided to hold this seminar because of the general interest in OSS, and specifically because agency CIOs expressed interest at a previous seminar in receiving more information about OSS and related issues.

NOIE's general approach to the issue of OSS is one of sceptical neutrality – between proprietary software and open source software, as well as between vendors. Proponents of the next 'killer-ap' have to deal with a very sceptical audience – CIOs in general and government in particular.

But we recognise that this is a significant issue, and we need, collectively, to develop a more informed understanding of the opportunities and challenges it presents.

As OSS is increasingly 'mainstreamed', it will become one of the options that agencies routinely consider.

This seminar will canvass some of the issues agencies will need to address – including security aspects, Return on Investment (ROI), Total Cost of Ownership (TCO), 24/7 support, and transition arrangements.

The Commonwealth perspective on OSS

Most of you probably know that the Commonwealth Government has not promulgated a specific policy on agency use of OSS. Unlike some other governments, we will not be rushing to do so.

The Commonwealth procurement framework is already sufficiently flexible to allow agencies to use OSS where there are benefits in doing so.

The same principles and guidelines that apply to the purchase of software generally apply in the case of OSS.

This means that agencies are free to implement OSS where it provides a fit-for-purpose, value-for-money solution to their needs. In fact not just free to, but obliged to under Commonwealth purchasing guidelines.

The Federal Government's e-government strategy – *Better Services, Better Government* (November 2002) – notes that the range of available software and business models is increasing.

It also states that 'The Government will encourage trials of open source software within the framework of fit-for-purpose and value-for-money'.

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Agencies' use of OSS

Of course many Commonwealth agencies already use OSS for some applications, particularly development and maintenance of agency websites.

What we are witnessing is its extension to other areas, and media attention has focused particularly on agencies' use of the Linux operating system, especially at the server end.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, the Bureau of Meteorology and Centrelink in particular have been the focus of attention because of their interest in Linux solutions.

DVA and the Bureau of Meteorology will, of course, be presenting at this seminar.

We are particularly keen to ensure that agencies share their knowledge about OSS.

I mentioned that this will probably be the first of a series, and it would be very useful if we could get other agencies to

speak at future seminars about their experiences with OSS as it develops.

Some State and Territory Government agencies have also undertaken significant OSS initiatives, and no doubt we can learn much from them too.

Future directions

Without speculating unduly what may happen in the future with regard to OSS, it is worth mentioning at this point that agencies are now better positioned to take a coordinated approach to ICT issues such as OSS which potentially impact government as a whole, beyond one agency.

A mechanism is now available to that purpose – I am referring to the Information Management Strategy Committee and the CIO Committee, which were formed late last year, and have already met twice.

The IMSC and CIOC were established to take a 'big picture' approach to ICT issues, and consider them from a cross-agency perspective.

Sourcing of ICT has already been identified as one of the priorities for examination by the IMSC and CIOC, and OSS could well be one of the issues addressed if there is a broad agency interest.

As agencies become more involved with OSS, there may be benefits in a more coordinated approach to some of the issues arising from OSS.

We will be keeping this under review, and inviting agencies' views on what issues may benefit from cross-agency consideration.

Conclusion

To conclude these opening remarks, I am sure that you will find this seminar stimulating and instructive.

NOIE will welcome your feedback, particularly whether we should have more seminars of this kind, and any particular areas of interest to you.

With that, I will now hand over to the Chair.

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