

Crossing the Digital Divide Volume 35

“Voice”

By Joseph Feigon

For the Observer

Democracy: a form of government where the governed elect the governors to act “by the people and for the people”. The problem, grossly over-simplified, is two-fold: 1) Not enough of the governed voice their opinions by placing a vote, so the governors governing are governing for and by a select, not majority group; 2) Lawmakers make laws written by lawyers to protect the state and the corporations; very little (if anything) has been done to improve the quality of life for the person.

There are several Open Source licensing models (Apache, BSD, MIT, Mozilla, GNU), the most common theme is reflected in this preamble of GNU/GPLv3:

When we speak of free software, we are referring to freedom, not price. Our General Public Licenses are designed to make sure that you have the freedom to distribute copies of free software (and charge for them if you wish), that you receive source code or can get it if you want it, that you can change the software or use pieces of it in new free programs, and that you know you can do these things.

Fundamentally, Open Source “for the people, by the people”, is a text book example of democracy. Check out the projects at <http://sourceforge.net>. The Internet knows limited boundaries. Visit Sourceforge, browse the software projects, maybe there’s something there that you can use.

The following are examples of well supported, widely used, free software solutions:

- The Apache web server: over 50% of the url’s served by Apache
- Apache Open Office: a viable alternative to Microsoft Office
- VLC Player: plays just about any video format (Apple/Windows/etc.)
- Mozilla Firefox: a solid browser for use on Mac/Windows/Linux as an option to Safari/Internet Explorer
- Mozilla Thunderbird: a real email/calendar program, no Outlook needed.
- Gimp: Artists and Photographers in need of Photoshop horsepower? Look no further.
- SugarCRM: Customer relationship management. Enterprise quality, scalable, completely customizable. Excellent platform where needed.
- CentOS and Ubuntu Linux distributions: Complete operating systems for the Enterprise, Retail and Desktop environments.

I often describe the computer as the electronic equivalent of a Swiss Army Knife. To many, the PC has one or two jobs. For others, the computer is their canvas, typewriter or analytics lab. Software applications are the tools for scientists, builders, planners and plumbers, designers, professionals and farmers, too.

Successful Open Source projects provide a common platform flexible enough to address a community of people’s interest/needs. Feature updates, bug fixes, and specialized modules will become available as users provide feedback and/or program enhancements. A given

project lead will manage inputs (or have a team do so), and incorporate changes to future releases.

A software project succeeds or fails based on adoption and adaptation.

There's no denying the presence of "government". Unlike software, the government will not go away if we don't use it, nor will it get better if we let other users define what and how the government governs. If you are, like many of us, wondering how so-and-so got elected, or which new law benefits which niche group, then it time to make sure your voice is heard, get out there and make your vote matter.