



10 MYTHS

ABOUT RUNNING OPEN SOURCE
SOFTWARE IN YOUR BUSINESS

ActiveState

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MYTH 1

You Have to Choose Between Open Source Software and Proprietary Software

When it comes to open source software, there are two camps: there are open source zealots who insist that Windows never works, and Linux is king! And then there are the naysayers who would sooner eat dirt than troubleshoot an Apache web server. So, who is right? If only it were that simple. In truth, open source software is not as flawless as some advocates would like you to believe; but neither is it as menacing as opponents say. Open source software, combined with responsible checks and balances, will put your business development projects in good stead. In this white paper, we debunk myths on both sides of the debate to help you decide how best to adopt open source software in your business.

Even if you wanted to, it would be nearly impossible to run a software business using exclusively open source or proprietary software. While the number of open source software projects is rising, you would be hard pressed to find an open source solution for every feature and function that your business requires.

Even more impractical would be trying to keep open source software out of your development shop all together. Gartner says that by 2012, 90% of commercial software will contain significant amounts of open source code, much of it coming in through embedded applications. At last year's Open Source Summit Gartner analyst Mark Driver warned software developers, "Open source is going to come into your network whether you like it or not. It has become completely impractical to avoid the subject." Plus, there is plenty of evidence that hybrid development

models work well. Even big players are giving hybrid development the thumbs up. For example, Sun's acquisition of MySQL blends proprietary and open source software together in one product.

MYTH 2

Open Source Software is Free!

Open source software is far from free. You won't need to purchase software licenses, but you will pay for open source software in a variety of other ways. With no guaranteed technical support waiting for your call, you will need to hire and retain open source experts who must stay up-to-date with platform issues, fixes and bugs. Of course, keeping proprietary software working well can be equally time consuming. Sometimes it is even worse because you need to regularly submit bug requests to the vendor and wait for action.

Additional open source software costs can sneak up on you and your business when complex integration issues arise. Even if you have open source software developers in-house, it is unlikely they will be able to work through all issues quickly and easily. Your developers' time plus the risk of unpredictable open source software release dates can add to expenses and stress.

MYTH 3

Implementing Open Source Software is Only About Saving Money

It is easy to assume that software development companies use open source first and foremost to save money. While not having to shell out for licenses can reduce costs, there are some solid technical reasons to choose open source over proprietary software, such as the ever-improving, extensible nature of open source, which

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appeals to many developers. They know the code is continually adapting, evolving and stabilizing. But there is also the perception that open source communities are chomping at the bit to fix issues--another myth.

The price of an open source dynamic language maintenance and support subscription for Perl, Python or Tcl is typically a fraction of the annual salary for an experienced programmer, but the value is much higher. In many instances, an expert programmer can be as effective as ten average programmers, which directly benefits your business and its operations.

MYTH 4

If You Choose Open Source Software, You Are On Your Own

Just because open source software doesn't come with a 24/7 help desk doesn't mean you are on your own. When open source first entered the software scene in the nineties, enterprise developers were at the mercy of the development community for support. But over the years, the swift adoption of open source software in the enterprise has created a demand for stable open source distributions and comprehensive support and maintenance for open source software deployments. Third-party providers now offer safety nets for businesses deploying open source software by packaging stable builds with expert technical support, development advice and rapid fixes that respond to changes to the open source code.

ActiveState is an example of a third party that provides enterprise level open source distributions for Perl, Python and Tcl. By implementing an enterprise distribution package, businesses combine the benefits of open source software with reliable, expert technical support.

MYTH 5

Licensing is Always a Nightmare

Open source code must be licensed. This ensures that the code is not exploited by organizations that use it in their projects, but do not release their refinements or innovations back into the community. It is true that deciphering open source software licensing requirements is a bit of a puzzle, but that should not turn you off open source for good.

If the thought of working through the "legalese" on your own is overwhelming, you can always pass the compliance hot potato over to a third-party licensing expert, like ActiveState, who will make sure your bases are covered.

MYTH 6

Open Source Software Equals Open Standards

Advocates cite open standards as a good reason to use open source software, but the two are not synonymous. They are often coupled because many open standards have an open source reference implementation available. Open source software is simply a licensing model; it does not equal best practices, like incorporating open standards. If open standards are important to you, make sure to do your homework. While open source development encourages the use of open standards and protocols for interoperability, it does not guarantee software development best practices.

MYTH 7

It Is For Non-Conformists

We once overheard a CTO refer to open source developers as "code cowboys." It is a persona that might have

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fit a decade ago, but in 2008 open source development no longer qualifies as “fringe.” Open source has become ubiquitous. MySQL from Sun is a good example: it is one of the most popular database management systems in the world, with and more than 11 million installations and the Linux operating system now holds 12.7% of the overall server market, according to a report filed last year by analysts at IDC. Even Microsoft uses open source software. At ActiveState, we have customers of all sizes, from mid-sized development shops, to AlterPoint, which helps some of the world’s largest companies manage their networks, adopting open source distributions in their enterprise software projects. Open source software is no longer at the peripheral of development and it is naive to think it’s not being used inside your organization, either in the form of development tools like Eclipse and Bugzilla or in business-critical operations.

MYTH 8

Open Source Software Is Not a Good Choice for Mission-Critical Functions

As open source software becomes commonplace inside enterprise software development, there is a growing trend toward using it within “differentiating technologies”—the features that give products their competitive edge. Last year, Forrester surveyed 500 IT decision makers using open source software in business-critical applications. Nearly 80% surveyed opted for open source because it often supports software development best practices. Plus, they could use code without restrictions and they could avoid being locked into a single vendor.

As long as you know your open source components are good quality, well supported and free from intellectual property concerns, open source software can be a good

choice for business-critical applications. In fact, open source software can be the best approach because there is no risk that the software will be discontinued, as can happen with proprietary software.

MYTH 9

Open Source Software is Lower Quality

“You get what you pay for” may be good advice when it comes to choosing a restaurant, but it does not ring true in software. Because of its crowd-sourced development model, open source code often has fewer bugs and becomes more flexible and reliable with each passing week. Because it is peer-reviewed, open source is ever-improving and constantly adapting. But, it is important to keep in mind that not all open source code evolves at the same rate. Popular projects, like Firefox, progress rapidly. But, if you are using obscure open source code, the smaller development community means slower development, fewer features and less quality control.

MYTH 10

Your Business is Not Using Open Source Software

Here come the stats: A 2006 Forrester study showed 75% of large businesses surveyed were either using or planning to use open source software, up from 60% the year before. There’s also Gartner’s prediction of 90% open source adoption in enterprise software development businesses by 2012.

Despite the inevitable adoption of open source software, you can control how your organization implements it. If you haven’t already, it is time to create your open source strategy, set up policies and make decisions about the role open source software will play in your organization.

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In many cases, software developers are not sure how much open source software they have running in-house, whether it is part of their operating system or their development tools. You must know what is happening within your organization because if you can't manage it, you can't control it. Just allowing open source software to roll into your business without proper planning and consideration is risky.

In the last decade, there has been plenty of speculation about the promises and ills of open source software. More and more businesses are integrating open source into business software development, is evidence that developers and customers trust it and that it can be a smart choice for software development businesses that don't

want to become dependent on vendors. But, when you weight both sides of the argument, it makes good sense to put safeguards in place that limit risks of open source adoption. Ask yourself these questions: Do you have the resources available to manage open source? Is the open source solution you're considering an acceptable risk/reward ratio? Should you consider a supported enterprise open source language distribution instead? Do you need help answering these questions? ActiveState experts can help you safely introduce open source into your business. Contact us today for a complimentary consultation with ActiveState open source language specialists.

Contact ActiveState at 778.786.1101, or business-solutions@activestate.com for a complimentary consultation with ActiveState's language experts.



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ABOUT ACTIVESTATE

ActiveState believes that enterprises gain a competitive advantage when they are able to quickly create, deploy and efficiently manage software solutions that immediately create business value, but they face many challenges that prevent them from doing so. The company is uniquely positioned to help address these challenges through our experience with enterprises, people and technology. ActiveState is proven for the enterprise: more than two million developers and 97 percent of Fortune 1000 companies use ActiveState's end-to-end solutions to develop, distribute, and manage their software applications written in Java, Perl, Python, Node.js, PHP, Tcl and other dynamic languages. Global customers like Cisco, CA, HP, Bank of America, Siemens and Lockheed Martin trust ActiveState to save time, save money, minimize risk, ensure compliance and reduce time to market.