INTRODUCTION

“Open source” refers to software that can be used, distributed, and modified free of charge with very few restrictions (Open Source Initiative, 2014). Popular examples of open source software are the Linux operating system, Apache HTTP Server, MySQL, PHP, and Filezilla (University of Liverpool/Laureate Online Education, 2014). Many open source software are registered using the GNU General Public License (GPL). The Apache HTTP Server, utilizes its own license, which is compatible with the GNU GPL (Apache Software Foundation, 2012). These licenses usually state that the software’s source code must be made available, allows anyone to modify it, and be free of charge (Opensource.com, 2014). The advantages and disadvantages of utilizing open source software will be further explained below.

ADVANTAGES OF OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE

The first and most obvious advantage of using open source software is of course, that it is free. An organization or individual without the financial resources to acquire proprietary software such as Oracle Database and IBM’s HTTP Server can instead acquire the free alternative option. Second, the availability of the source code of this type of software makes it scrutinized by a global audience of programmers, who have the ability to alter and improve it. Thus, bugs can be fixed at a much faster pace than that of proprietary software. It is common knowledge in the world of software development that Linux and Apache have benefitted immensely from the community of open source programmers. Third, open source software can be altered to fit the needs of the individual or organization because of the availability of the source code. Proprietary software usually restricts such modifications.

DISADVANTAGES OF OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE

One of the disadvantages of using open source software is that of being able to receive continuous support, as well as maintenance (Hammond, 2009). Since such software is reliant on the efforts of volunteer programmers, it may not have the backing of a large powerhouse organization such as Microsoft, Oracle, and IBM because the profit motive does not exist. It has been my experience that open source software is often poorly documented, and I have been many times reliant on resources such as online discussion forums. Second, just because open source software is free, does not mean it does not come without risks. It is assumed that the open nature of this type of software makes for better quality, which has undergone rigorous testing. However, a survey conducted recently revealed that most open-source programmers are either unaware of, or do not have any type of testing method in place (Koru et al, 2007).

CONCLUSION

As once can see, there are advantages and disadvantages to using open source software. For mission or safety critical applications, I would advise caution when choosing to integrate “free” software into one’s organization. Tradeoffs must inevitably be made in terms of support and financial resources available.

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