
In another serendipitous co-incidence UK gov announces OSS desktop trial

As I observed during the Government IT saga, AKA "Govt IT - a recipe for rip-offs":

A simple analysis of the time line of the Inquiry shows a remarkable tendency for the Government and those we might consider to be in its team to publish material just before key Inquiry dates, or on one occasion handed to the Committee Chairman during an evidence session. With that in mind we were curious to see what else had been published in the last few days that might be relevant to this report.

So really, when the London School of Economics published a report Total cost of ownership of open source software (pdf) detailing all the ways open source is a good idea; I had no excuse not to have got out there to look for some government synchronicity.

And lo, there was...

Apparently the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is to pilot 1000 opensource desktops. Mike Truran, customer delivery director [said]:

the DWP had not yet moved to open source on the desktop because the department relied heavily on Microsoft Access and Excel. "If the pilot works we will take it forward"

The beauty of this statement is how it might cause us to focus on the wrong question. This isn't about open source software (OSS). OSS is what happens when you sort all your other stuff out (did I mention open standards?).

As ever if you get people asking the wrong questions, ("why aren't you using open source?") the answers don't matter.

The real question is "why have you allowed yourself to become locked-in to Microsoft Access and Excel?" with added "Isn't it about time you broke the cycle of dependency?"

We've been here before and only this summer NHS Scotland tendered for an OSS proof of concept. However once you'd added back a requirement to run it on their Microsoft Windows 7 compliant hardware (pdf) and supported ActiveX in circumstances in which use of Internet Explorer requires an MS Windows OS licence then it's fairly easy to see how you'd not bother starting (did I mention open standards?)

So, if you're watching this pilot, either look for a renegotiation of terms with incumbent suppliers (we're still waiting for an answer, BTW) but don't hold your breath.

Did I mention that applying for benefits online still requires MS Windows?

-- Gerry Gavigan, Chair, 5 December 2011

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