

Laurie Wurster



Richard Ibbotson reports from Gartner's first Open Source conference

In his 'Open Source Goes Mainstream' keynote speech he made it clear that whether you see open source as marketing hype or a social or political movement, possibly even a licensing model or development paradigm, the only thing you can't afford to do is ignore it. In the battle between open source and commercial alternatives the hype is flying in all directions.

Open source software will undoubtedly play a part in your organisation in the years to come. What kind of place it takes depends on your infrastructure and future goals and your level of understanding of what is required. It is the time to step back and evaluate the realities of open source and all of its implications. The prestige that is offered by the Gartner analysts was in full view for everyone to see, and most people took their views extremely seriously. The audience was made up of some well known faces. One or two friends of Bill Gates, system administrators, network managers, software developers and marketing specialists. People from Germany and France, all around Eastern and Western Europe as well as the United States and even Japan.

DAY ONE

The conference was a lot like going to a regional open source conference in provincial England, in that there were a few small stands and two lecture theatres where the main events of the day took place. The

important difference of course was the presence of the Gartner analysts who are always able to deliver a view of the future or what it is that might be needed inside your own information technology environment. One of the highlights of the Gartner events is that you can make an appointment to talk to a Gartner analyst for a very personal 30 minute discussion. There are also analyst/user round table sessions where for 45 minutes eight people can discuss any topic with an analyst.

On the opening day the conference got under way when Mark Driver gave the welcome speech. Driver predicted that by 2007, 75 per cent of mainstream IT organisations will have a formal open source acquisition policy and management system in place. Those who don't will be in deep trouble. He went on to talk about the well known FUD that is circulated by closed source organisations, which make the claim that open source is anti-commercial and is therefore no use for business.

There was a short break, and then Jeroen Van Disseldorp, who is a consultant for the Dutch Government, took to the stage to give his talk about the use of open source software in the Dutch Citizen Registry project. This was started by the government of the Netherlands back in 2004. It is completely designed as a Service Oriented Architecture with an open source policy throughout.

It was thought that open source software

was a logical conclusion rather than a religious choice. Jeroen explained the inside workings of dealing with such a large task and about support issues, what to do with vendor lock in problems and the subject of bringing down the cost of the IT budget through the use of open source software. The project contains the data for 16.3 million Dutch citizens, which is about 480 inhabitants per square kilometre. In Holland there are 12 provinces and 458 municipalities with 16000+ Government organisations. It is not a trivial task to implement and maintain such a network. It's often referred to as a flagship open source project which has been closely observed by similar government projects elsewhere. The goals of the project are cost effectiveness, an improvement in the quality of the data, flexibility in the IT infrastructure and the stimulation of a competitive IT industry.

Before the end of the first day's session, analyst Andrea Di Maio gave his presentation "How Far Can Open Source Go? Lessons from the Public Sector." This was based on the fact that open source software is well established at the infrastructure level and for application development but there is still a lot of potential for further development and innovation. Most commercial enterprises see Linux or Apache as a normal part of their IT network or software inventory but few of them are looking at open source solutions for commercial enterprise applications. In other

Open Source Goes Mainstream

The Gartner Open Source conference took place at the Palau de Congressos de Catalunya, in the north west corner of Barcelona, on the 13th and 14th of June. It was running back to back with the Gartner Application Integration & Web Services Summit, which began a day earlier. Both conferences were well attended and demonstrated excellent analysis of present day information technology trends. The Gartner Open Source Summit covered all the essential topics, broke down the issues and shone some light in the darker corners. Information about open source software is easy to find, but independent strategic analysis isn't. This is why people go to Gartner events.

A long time ago, a small company called Microsoft was helped out by the Gartner group. As we all know Microsoft eventually became one the largest companies on the

planet, and most likely it was the existence of Microsoft which was one of the major factors in the creation of free software technologies. The lack of the MS Windows non-disclosure agreement has helped innumerable developers and many multi-nationals to create and innovate in a way that was not possible before.

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We now find that whilst Gartner haven't completely turned their back on proprietary software, they have now gone a long way towards pushing free software technologies, in the way that they used to endorse the Microsoft forerunner. Wall Street, just like

Hollywood, is mostly living in the post-Microsoft era. Open source software has been around for years. The recent success of GNU/Linux has brought the software into the commercial mainstream. Some very large multi-nationals are routinely using this technology. Many IT vendors are developing GNU/Linux compatible products that rival

their proprietary cousins.

There was a thread or mantra rolling through the whole of the Gartner conference, first of all in the presentation given by Mark Driver, who is Research Vice President and was Summit chair for Gartner.

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Nikos Drakos



areas of technology you might find that the commercial sector will lead in new ideas, but in the world of open source this is not so. The public sector is ahead of the game when it comes to innovation with open source technology. It is at the forefront of the tectonic shift in the way that software is procured, developed and deployed. This will change the vendor landscape for the public sector and other industry sectors. Di Maio's talk was quite an eye opener for anyone who might not be aware of the changes taking place in the world around us.

use of GNU/Linux has played a major part in that. This is now expanding its role in datacenter services, thus moving the open source technologies to the centre of the stage. Following on at 9.00 a.m. "Innovating with Open Source – Understanding Cost, Development Cycles and Legal Implications" was the presentation given on the Strategies and Adoption track by Fabien Felix, who is the Senior Technology Manager for Amadeus. Open source software was introduced into Amadeus some years ago as a method for speeding up implementations, with a focus

Samba know that once the devil himself has been worshipped, the satanic rites have been read and signatures have been added to the ancient document, there is no going back. 1998 saw the migration from FreeBSD to GNU/Linux. In 2005, OpenOffice.org was introduced to the city of Vienna and is now ready for use. With such advocacy for open source and excellence in the propagation of the General Public Licence how could anything go wrong in this best of all possible worlds? The answer is that some software is open source and some is closed source.

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Mark Driver



DAY TWO

As is normal with this kind of event, the second day will have an early start and a late finish. Wednesday morning saw the first presentation start at 8am. The conference now split into two tracks, the Strategies and Adoption track and the Technologies Track. What follows can only be a summary, for reasons of space.

On the Strategies and Adoption side of things Nikos Drakos, who is Research Vice-President for Gartner, kicked off with a presentation entitled "Open Source Experiences Gained and Lessons Learned". This was a brilliant explanation of some of the key success stories of mainstream IT projects and a discussion of some of the best practices that were used for optimal return on investment at minimal risk and cost. Meanwhile at the same time over on the Technologies Track Massimo Pezzini, VP Distinguished Analyst for Gartner, got started on his presentation entitled "Open Source in the Datacenter: Building the Software Stack". This was about the fact that open source software has been a component in many elements of datacenter infrastructure and the

on innovative solutions. The use of open source technologies raises a few questions about costs, due to the fact that although there is no cost for the software there can be peripheral expenses which may not be obvious. Another key element is the legal risk, because of the complexity of open source licencing models. The talk gave examples of how Amadeus managed the various pitfalls and described future milestones that will make changes to working practices.

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Over on the Technologies and Products track, Peter Pfläging, who is the Head of Staff Unit Co-ordination for the ICT Architecture in the City of Vienna, gave an end-user case study about open source technologies in the Municipality of Vienna. The city has 62,000 civil servants and 420 employees in the ICT department. Back in 1989, some open source technologies were introduced for software development purposes. By 1991 this had changed to TCP/IP stack development, with Unix software based on the GNU project. By 1994 the Samba project had been introduced. Most of us who know

Pfläging gave some excellent examples of what was wrong with the project and how the various constraints that were experienced on the way through the maze towards enlightenment were dealt with. The final move, where the closed source software is physically removed, is probably going to take place some time soon.

Following this on the Strategies and Adoption track, a panel comprising Jean-Pierre Laisne, Rishab Ayer Ghosh and Nikos Drakos held a discussion with a title of "Open Source Inside Out". The open source software model relies on a community of developers and users for its success. The myth is that the mob creates a disorganised effort. Instead of this we find well defined best practices and organised management processes. Over on the other track at the same time, Laurie Wurster gave her presentation about the "Economics of Open Source: Measuring Market Influences". Laurie conducted extensive interviews both within and outside Gartner to find out what was going on with open source software. She showed off a large number of statistics, and explained that open source lets you do more with less.

Probably one of the more interesting presentations of the morning session was given by Phil Dawson, who is Research Vice President for Gartner. "Enterprise Linux: Will Adolescence Yield to Maturity" gave an account of how GNU/Linux and open source might be the most disruptive technologies and development models since the creation of the internet, but with the evolving commercialisation of the software from adolescence to maturity, how will GNU/Linux progress in the next five years? Dawson explained that Gartner had moved away from an argument which involved the size of the server towards the workload carried out by the server. He also explained that the introduction of GNU/Linux now means that Gartner no longer receives requests to move from UNIX to MS Windows. Times have changed considerably. He gave a SWOT analysis comparing GNU/Linux, MS Windows and UNIX. This means strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Anyone who would like to get a proper understanding of open source in the enterprise should try to take in a SWOT presentation at some time.

FUDING ABOUT

Just before lunch, Rishab Ayer Ghosh, who is the Senior Researcher and Program Leader at the United Nations University, gave a presentation on the Strategies and Adoption track entitled "Who stands behind open source?" This was all about one well known aspect of FUD generation and propagation.

The closed source FUDDER, or 'fear uncertainty and doubt' psychologist, will mutter dark words about 'who writes open source software?' and 'since we don't know who they are then how could we trust them?' Ghosh explained that quality and processes can be measured. He showed who creates open source software. A high quality talk with plenty of solid fact, and just the right tone.

After lunch the most interesting presentation was given by Mark Driver, who got up once again to give a talk about "Examining the Open Source Ecosystem". Driver went through a SWOT analysis and described offensive and defensive strategies. He went on to claim that "The influence of open source is inevitable". He then showed some open source business models, which he classified under the following headings:

- Consultancy
- Service and support
- Packaging
- Stack integration
- Patronage i.e. loss leader – make no money
- Extend and enhance

The talk outlined a number of the key commercial and non-profit organisations that help to evolve and drive the open source community. In a few short words Mark put together a well defined landscape which will most likely continue for a long time to come.

The final keynote speech, delivered at 5pm by Nikos Drakos, was about open source in

the workplace: "What it Promises and What it Delivers". Open source is beginning to make some impact beyond the traditional infrastructure strongholds. Nikos gave an eloquent and well planned speech showing how real projects are appearing, and companies are starting to evaluate products for collaboration, content management systems and enterprise portals. This trend has the possible effect of permanently changing the list of software that is bought in by a commercial organisation.

The message is now very clear that open source and GNU/Linux is definitely mainstream computing technology and not the geeky back room stuff that it used to be. The bicycle clips have been replaced with the shades and the private executive jet.

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LINKS

Gartner homepage
www.gartner.com

Open Source Summit
europe.gartner.com/os