

Open Source:

Lower cost software, customized to order.

When considering which software applications to buy, more and more midsize companies are considering open source — Open source software holds great appeal for small and medium sized organizations.

What is open-source?

Open-source is a set of principles around how software is developed. The most important of these principals is that the source code, the building blocks of the software, be openly available to everyone without prejudice. A common misconception is that because the source code is open, that the software is free. Free, in this case, refers to freedom of choice and freedom to modify as you see fit, not free of charge.

Why is open-source a good thing?

Open-source software is gaining ground as an effective way to save money and provide affordable options for customization.

First and foremost, open-source software is much less expensive than its proprietary counterparts. This is simply because of the low overhead for development; people working from home in their spare time. But open-source is also, by its nature, more flexible, reliable, robust and customizable than proprietary software.

In addition, open-source provides much better “Try before you buy” opportunities, along with the ability to scale without the major costs associated with traditional software sales cycles.

When is open-source not good for me?

Open-source software holds great promise, but if you don't choose a mature product or you don't have the

talent to make it work properly, you may end up with software that doesn't work for you and may hold you back. It is critical to either have on-staff personnel or vendors that have the knowledge necessary to move you forward with open-source.

What about support?

Unlike proprietary software, support may or may not be available commercially from the developers. This should play a major part in your organizations' decision-making process. If you can keep on staff talent or vendors that have the ability to support the software, developer support may or may not be necessary.

Where is open-source making inroads?

There are many places where open-source software makes sense. One key area is ERP (enterprise resource planning). Over the course of five years, very little changes in an ERP environment. Other popular areas include Medical Imaging and workflow, CRM (customer relationship management), and VoIP (voice over Internet Protocol) replacement of traditional phone systems.