

Table of types of Open Source Software and related issues

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Type of Application	Issues
<p>General productivity tool</p>	<p>Interoperability and data exchange</p> <p>Applications that generate data files should be able to export such files in open formats as well as popular proprietary formats. This means that they will be able to exchange data with proprietary software applications.</p>
<p>eg Inkscape, Audacity, OpenOffice.org, GIMP, Firefox, Thunderbird</p>	<p>Learning how to use</p> <p>The learning curve for applications is very variable. Learning an entire Office suite like OpenOffice.org in all its details will take years but most people don't need that detail. If you have already learnt what you need in proprietary software such as MS Office most of that learning can transfer to OpenOffice.org. The learning required for a major upgrade in MS Office eg MS Office 2003 to MS Office 2007 is similar to the learning required to move from MS Office 2003 to OpenOffice.org 3.0. Inkscape is probably simpler to learn than most of the many proprietary vector design programs and is comparable to Xara Xtreme.</p>
<p>Ã,Ã</p>	<p>Installation and set up</p> <p>Mostly these are as simple to set up as any of the proprietary equivalents. Network set ups and deployments will need specific considerations such as permissions and security but no more so than with proprietary software. Setting up Firefox on a network is likely to be more involved than installing Inkscape.</p>
<p>Ã,Ã</p>	<p>People</p> <p>Experience shows that people vary! Some people will accept a new application discarding any previous ones they used, others will be outraged and having to be convinced. Providing choice is one way around this but it is likely that if you want to save money you will end up having to provide the proprietary software as well as the open source. You might make both applications available for a trial period. There is no universal answer but people are just as big an obstacle to change as technology so it needs consideration.</p>
<p>Web applications</p>	<p>Interoperability and data exchange</p> <p>Firstly ensure that application is accessible through a standards compliant Web Browser. If it works with</p>

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	<p>it almost certainly will be. Avoid any software that only work with a particular proprietary browser. The applications will all use SQL databases to store information. In principle it should be possible to move data between SQL database applications whether Closed Source. If content files are based on Open standards which is likely in Open Source Applications exchange will be assured. In practice the complexity of the data structures involved in specialised applications, as structuring lessons, is likely to result in a less than perfect match when moving information to another similar application. For example, a new Virtual Learning Environment with a specific classification structure "3 part lesson" will not necessarily have fields corresponding to this structure in the one used currently.</p>
<p>eg Moodle, Drupal, Mahara, OpenGroupware, One to Zero</p>	<p>Learning how to use</p> <p>There are differences but once one application is mastered the methods are usually similar and consistent with the Web interface. Consistency of approach and user interface makes web applications generally quick to learn.</p>
<p>Ã,Ã</p>	<p>Installation and set up</p> <p>Set up of web applications requires a server and supporting software stack. This could be hosted in school or by a specialist provider. If you want an Open Source support stack it will probably be LAMP - Linux, Apache, MySQL and PHP/Perl/Python. By outsourcing server hosting company you can avoid the need to know anything about any technicality other than using the application. You also enable your applications to be available to your community 24/7 with a faster internet connection than you are likely to want to pay for on site. If you use a closed source stack it will probably require MS IIS server running on a Windows server and a proprietary database such as MS SQL server. If you do this check that there is no further dependency on other proprietary software applications or you could find yourself locked into unanticipated costs.</p>
<p>Ã,Ã</p>	<p>People</p> <p>Since web applications are more recent and more focused on user interface they are more likely to be accepted and change from a mature and familiar desktop application therefore makes sense to think very carefully before deploying any Closed Source and proprietary web applications because this is the area where Free and Open Source applications are having the biggest immediate impact. There is a great deal of risk in being locked into proprietary web products at a time when many of the vendors of these products are unlikely to survive. Then what happens to your data?</p>

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Network management tools	Interoperability and data exchange The main issues for interoperability and data exchange at the server level is when client machines are dependent on proprietary protocols or there is dependency on a central Directory for file permissions and group policies. There are ways round these issues but it requires specialised technical knowledge. With network services such as firewalls, web serving, proxy servers and such like there should be no real problems with interoperability.
eg GNU/Linux Server, LTSP, Karoshi, iTalc, Webmin, gnome nettool	Learning how to use The learning required for Network management tools is the widest in range. Some aspects require virtual specialised technical knowledge at all where as others require knowledge of network security and associated issues.
Ã,Ã	Installation and Setup Many of these tools eg Karoshi are designed to make it easy to set up and administer GNU/Linux servers in schools. The main issue with set up is understanding wider issues such as security and the physical time it takes to prepare software and machines. This is not necessarily any worse than for Close Source proprietary software but it is an overhead in terms of migration.
Ã,Ã	People The main aspect is technical expertise and willingness to keep up to date. If you have technicians that show they are willing to implement Open Source solutions and have demonstrated ability to support these even on a large scale you have a valuable asset. Investing in further training is likely to bring real improvements in cost benefit and efficiency to the organisation.

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