

client: Confidential
project: Open Source article
objective: Blog Post

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Open Source: code and software you can use and create

When you hear the term "open source," what do you think it means? Code you can take, hack and turn into something else? Or software you don't have to buy? Whatever comes to mind, here are a few tips on OpenSource.

Strictly defined, "open source" means code, software, or anything related that is required to be free of charge and stay that way. Developers can use it to create what they want, and freely redistribute it. O'Reilly Media uses this definition (Source: opensource.com):

"Open source usually refers to software that is released with source code under a license that ensures that derivative works will also be available as source code, protects certain rights of the original authors, and prohibits restrictions on how the software can be used or who can use it."

The OpenSource Initiative is an organization that "stewards of the Open Source Definition (OSD) and the community-recognized body for reviewing and approving licenses as OSD-conformant." It also means that you, the user, can directly participate in the development and improvement of current and future software.

Many people are familiar with Apache OpenOffice, the free open source productivity suite that goes up against Microsoft Office. The entire download suite is a nearly identical work-alike that has all the basic functionality as Office, and can be used in place of any one of the tools. The most popular, MS Word, is recreated in Writer, and documents are easily saved in MS Word format. The entire suite takes just a few minutes to download and install, and you're ready to work. Support is a click away at the website—no long phone calls on hold.

SourceForge is a website that supports open source software to make it successful. With over 2,000 tools and applications available, anything you need in open source is ready to use just by downloading. Apache OpenOffice is also available here along with tools for audio/video, business, games, security/utilities, and more.

Try an OpenSource tool, and you may never go back to COTS.

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