



Conquering Open-Source Fears

BY SHIRLEY S. SAVAGE

ALL TOO OFTEN, companies greet the idea of open-source computing as a threat to the way business is currently done. One of the challenges faced by open-source advocates is to change that perspective. Open-source computing will change business as we know it. But rather than viewing it as a threat, it's helpful to see open-source computing as a business opportunity that needs to be embraced.

Linux Executive Report (LER) recently spoke with Dr. Robert S. Sutor, vice president, Standards and Open Source at IBM, to gain some insight on how to accomplish that change of view successfully.

(If you'd like to read more about Sutor's thoughts on life, open standards, and open source, visit: <http://sutor.com/blog>.)

LER: Why is it so difficult for companies to adjust to open-source computing?

RS: It's not unreasonable for people to have a natural resistance to open-sourcing software, particularly if they grew up in a culture that was about developing and then licensing software for money. Therefore, executives need to be much more explicit about open-source goals and laying down a number of steps to reach that goal. One of those steps is a business plan. If a company is trying to move to an open-sourcing world, what are the business goals? What will the company look like in terms of its products, the people to

help make this transition, and the revenue structure?

Executives need to ask: Is my company currently equipped personnel-wise to make the transition to open sourcing? I'm not suggesting that you fire everyone. Rather, there needs to be training, discussion, and very open

and participating in a strong open-source community can lead to a lot of innovation, which will help up create those connections and build things that people haven't previously envisioned. When innovation happens, there will be a lot of growth opportunities for those who choose to seize them.



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communication since people can harbor deep-seated reservations about moving to open sourcing.

LER: Isn't it all about conquering the fear of the unknown?

RS: In the last 150 years or so, people have gotten used to the concept of ideas being discovered and then owned. If you go back farther in history to everyone's favorite inventor and master, Leonardo da Vinci, the goal in making discoveries was to advance the general knowledge of civilization. Much of this knowledge created hundreds of years ago was a rediscovery of what people once knew as well as an incredible burst of creativity. In da Vinci's time, there was a lot of free sharing of ideas, which enabled people to make new connections between them.

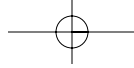
IBM very much believes that nurturing

LER: What is your advice to those who are reluctant to embrace open-source computing?

RS: View open sourcing as a way for brand-new markets to be created, to have new product categories, and to have new ways to serve your customers. Those new ways might not be traditional, but could be profitable.

We're living in an age now that's almost a Renaissance period for software. People are more willing to experiment with the technology and the business models. We don't know where it's going. But at least we are creating the environment in which wonderful things can happen.

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