Open Source Solutions Allow Libraries to Offer Superior Services
Amy Begg De Groff, Head of Library Technology Services

Open Source Solutions
For this presentation, open source solutions refers to software running on a computer (server, desktop, laptop) for which the source code is readily available. The philosophy behind open source is that all users have ideas which should be shared. Open source software is built and maintained by communities of volunteers which adhere to strict contribution guidelines through which the software developed receives careful review. The Open Source Initiative: http://www.opensource.org/

Linux is a common open source solution. Linux features many “flavors” or configurations, each of which have a devoted and talented group of developers and users. Learn more at The Linux Foundation: http://www.linuxfoundation.org/

Howard County Library decided to use one flavor of Linux to keep computers consistent for users. Ubuntu was selected because of its clean design, its ease of use, and the huge support community behind it. Learn more about Ubuntu: http://www.ubuntu.com/

Ubuntu’s philosophy: (1) Every computer user should have the freedom to download, run, copy, distribute, study, share, change and improve their software for any purpose, without paying licensing fees; (2) Every computer user should be able to use their software in the language of their choice; (3) Every computer user should be given every opportunity to use software, even if they work under a disability.
Libraries

Libraries provide information to all. For centuries, libraries have mediated access to information while educating users on information sources, researching techniques, and offering recommendations. Consistent with the Ubuntu philosophy, information and education is offered by libraries freely to all. The similarities in the missions of libraries and the open source community are quickly discernible.

Superior Services

Howard County Library and Open Sense Solutions

6 Branches offering a total of 300 customer computers
“Groovix” desktop, designed and maintained by Open Sense Solutions
http://opensensesolutions.com/
all feature Ubuntu, Firefox, OpenOffice.org, Mplayer
all open source software which is licensed for no charge
no time limits except during busy periods

Significant cost saving; hardware and software combined:

$10.00 a computer using Groovix and 5-7 year old Dells
vs.
$1000.00 a computer featuring proprietary software

Howard County Library Customer Computer Activity

1/3 of customers who visit Howard County Library come for the computers
1/3 use the computers for personal business
35% reading email / 47% doing personal business
1/3 use the computers for word processing
60% had computers at home
1/3 use the computers for information seeking
53% using the catalog
6% using online databases
47% using the internet to do research
we tracked web hits (anonymously) as well
80% of web activity went to five web sites (in order by number of hits)
MySpace / Google/ our library catalog* / FaceBook / Yahoo.com

* our customer computers begin at our web site (not our online catalog)
Open Source applications used by Howard County Library

Amarok
Apache
DeskNow
Firefox
GIMP
Joomla
KohaZoom -- fully functioning integrated library system (April 2008 launch)
Mplayer
MySQL
OpenOffice.org
OpenVPN
PHP
Pigin (moving to Meebo)
Rhythmbox Music Player
Ubuntu (desktop and server)
Xsane Image Scanner

(pilot project designed to reduce paper generated and stored in administrative offices)

BirdsEye view of Howard County Library’s Ubuntu desktop distribution

All customer machines (300) run Groovix
Dell GX 150s / 512 MB of RAM (purchased refurbished)
60% of staff machines run a Ubuntu desktop, configured for our needs to include:
word processing, image capture (from digital camera), and audio compatibility – for staff participation in web based meetings
HP Compaq dc5700 small form factor / 1 gig RAM
Remaining 40% of staff to migrate after Koha deployment
HP Compaq dc5700 small form factor / 1 gig RAM
Marketing moving to MAC
iMAC 20” monitor / 1 gig RAM
Accounting to remain on XP until Ubuntu-accounting solution found (2 machines)
current vendor works only with SUSE Linux)
Windows XP Dell OptiPlex 170L / 1 gig RAM