

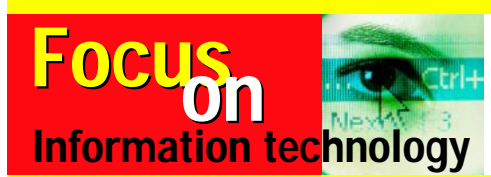


OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE is back in the headlines. Around the world, governments at every level have started to approve or even mandate open source solutions in their operations.

The State of Massachusetts made the biggest splash by announcing that effective January 1, 2007, there will be two acceptable document formats within the state government: Adobe's PDF format is one and OpenDocument the other, with Microsoft products conspicuous by their absence. Microsoft Office is currently the *de facto* global standard for office documents, and will undoubtedly remain so for years to come. Even in its wildest dreams, Massa-

chusetts does not expect all its workers and everyone they communicate with to switch over to OpenOffice 2.0 suite. In fact, documents can be converted so easily and automatically that it is doubtful whether anyone might be more than mildly inconvenienced. So how to interpret the Massachusetts move? Is it moral support for the open source 'community,' a genuine desire to make the operations of state government more accessible to all, or a protest against high software licence fees? Whatever the motivation, Microsoft will only take notice if it believes Massachusetts intends to move all its IT operations to less expensive software and others begin to follow.

A more important but less publicized event was the success of Ubuntu Linux. Not only has this operating system become the



United States' number one Linux distribution for the desktop, it was developed by the South African company Canonical. Its founder, software tycoon Mark Shuttleworth, has committed millions of dollars to support open source software throughout Africa and around the world. Among manufacturers, HP has started to offer Ubuntu as an operating system on some of its computers. Many challenging issues remain but taxpayers everywhere should be grateful for meaningful competition in the software market.

Richard Bray

E-registration for voters

by Jeff Jedras

BC develops homegrown online voter registration

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY projects don't have to be big to have an impact. For example, Elections BC's online voter registration project, which cost just \$300,000

to design and implement, eliminated the need for costly door-to-door enumeration.

Elections BC spokesperson Jennifer Miller said the system, which had a trial-run in a 2004 by-election and was live province-wide for the provincial election last May, was a result of the organization's desire to make voter registration more efficient and increase accessibility for voters. She added they also knew in the long-term it would save them money.

"When we were planning our province-wide enumeration, we thought if we could send people a householder and say they can go online and confirm their information they'd be more likely to do it," said Miller. "We want to use it on an ongoing basis. We're going to have it for the long-term."

Between the time voter registration opened in February and closed on April 26th over 200,000 transactions were processed online. "It has been very successful," said Miller. She added they will continue to fine-tune the system for use in future elections, including making it compatible with older browsers and accessible for blind voters.

Elections BC turned to IT developer EDS Canada to design the system. Amanda Gray, the project manager for EDS, said security was an important concern, both internally and externally.

"There's confidentiality of voter registration information even within Elections BC because of privacy legislation," said Gray. "We've designed certain things into it to keep the system and the data within it secure."

Voter's list information doesn't appear on the screen so a person only sees the information they enter. The data is encrypted and secured and a random number code entered to prevent automated access. BC's Information and Privacy Commissioner signed-off on the system before it went live.

"We designed the system from scratch based on the quite detailed requirements provided by Elections BC; it was a one of a kind system," said Gray.

