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// **Press release for Fulcrum – maybe Metro??** //

Back to School with Linux and Open Software

At this time of year, a lot of computers get bought. Along with them, many students and their parents dole out a lot of cash for software that may be poor value for money. And student versions of software can have a nasty limitation – you lose the license to use them when you graduate or drop out.

There's an alternative, Free/Libre software, sometimes called open source. Under this umbrella, there is a huge array of possibilities. Well-known examples are the Firefox web browser, the OpenOffice.org suite of office productivity tools (word processor, spreadsheet, presentation and drawing program, and some smaller apps), and the Thunderbird email client. These all run on practically all operating systems, including Windows and Macintosh. The Free/Libre GNU/Linux and its distributions like Red Hat, SUSE, Debian and Ubuntu are full operating systems, and unlike Windows include comprehensive tools for building, repairing and learning about them.

The Computer Science Students Association and the Ottawa Canada Linux Users Group are teaming up to offer a workshop Sunday September 13 from 11:00 to 16:00 in STE C0136 (SITE) called “Back to School with Linux”, though other Free/Libre software will be presented.

Free/Libre means that you are granted a license to use, modify and redistribute the programs, generally as long as you offer the same license to others. Most folk are just happy to use it. Free/Libre does not have to be $0, but the vast majority of programs have a zero price download. This does not mean such software is no-cost. Sometimes you have to do a bit of extra work to ensure you save in the proper format – important for those big assignments that need to be handed in. And you eventually find yourself part of a rather friendly community offering mutual help, advice and support. Even the raw novice who finds a software interface confusing can help by communicating this to the developers, who – surprise, surprise compared to “for money” software – turn out to be real people with real names, and they often reply in person to figure out how to improve their software.

If you cannot get out to the event on September 13, then you may find some of the material at http://oclug.on.ca/getting-started/ of value. Note that there are several interesting ways to use Free/Libre software without touching your hard drive at all – LiveCD and LiveUSB techniques let you try things out, albeit a little bit slower than with conventionally installed software.

// **Need to add contacts??** //

Feedback and Suggestions

Thanks to all the volunteers for an excellent event today. It felt great to help so many people at once! A good number of people commented that they were impressed by how thorough, knowledgeable, and helpful we all were, and how much they appreciated our time and efforts. They also seemed to like the way we pooled our skill sets when one of us alone didn't have all the answers. Nickie and I (Lisa)

thoroughly enjoyed ourselves today.

Most of the specific feedback items below are courtesy of Nickie's astute observations today (13 Sep 2009). She turned out to be our de facto “customer greeter” for the day. I thought these observations would be extremely helpful for the future success and growth of this event. I have added some suggestions to help address some of these issues, along with some observations of my own. This is by no means comprehensive so please insert 2¢ units wherever appropriate. :)

From JN: These comments accord what I observed too. And in that I was one of the instigators, I realize we could have used some of these ideas. We were also not up to speed on publicity. The Fulcrum wanted a story, but I had to go away and did not really mobilize folk strongly enough beforehand. I'll also note that the April trial had so few “customers” that we didn't really get a good idea of what people expected. I do think now that we could schedule (and publicize) a few short (10 min) presentations on some of the issues raised below. I believe that we now have a better sense of the needs, and the points made are indeed astute. Thanks Nickie. (We'll also be trying to do a post-mortem on what went wrong with the promised internet access.) In case all of this sounds negative, those who asked questions seemed very pleased with the response and how we tried to show rather than tell, and how we managed to advance their capabilities in a practical and not theoretical way. Our shortcomings were in style, not substance.

From Lisa: Agreed. Participants repeatedly expressed their deep gratitude for our extensive knowledge and practical assistance. We shared a wealth of information today. One thing we demonstrated without a doubt is that we've got the know-how and teaching skills down pat. Despite areas where we needed polish, I felt very satisfied that we had provided valuable assistance to a lot of people. I don't want anyone to get the impression that this feedback is reflective of a negative view of the event. Nothing could be further from the truth.

- *Many people asked what group was hosting this event and how to reach us.**
- Suggestion: A large eye-catching banner giving the name of the event, our group name, website, meeting times, and someone they can contact directly in case they have questions later (or at least the info-at-oclug-dot-on-dot-ca e-mail address).

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 '''Most people didn't know what to expect.  Example 1: Several people walked
in expecting a formal lecture (not a hands-on workshop), and when they didn't
see a lecture, walked right back out.  Example 2: Most didn't know they could
bring their computers in for help, and needed to go back home to get them.
Example 3:  Some people came in and sat down, not knowing what to do, and
others wandered around the room.'''
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- Suggestion: Designate 2 “greeters” - someone to greet people at each door, encourage them to come in, make them feel welcome, direct them to resources and pair them up with volunteers. Nickie saw the need and did this for us today, and it really worked wonders to make things go smoothly.
- Suggestion: Name tags for volunteers, to help “customers” identify whom to flag down for assistance and to make us more personable and accessible.
- Suggestion: The flyers advertising the event could be changed to be more specific about the hands-on format, and encourage people to bring their computers in. We could specify that desktop computers are okay too; that all they need to bring is the box and we will furnish the monitor,

keyboard and mouse. (Also see next feedback item and suggestion below.)

- *The majority of the people were intermediate to advanced users who already knew something about GNU/Linux.**

'Many people asked if it's possible to dual-boot Windows with GNU/Linux.'

- Suggestion: To attract the curious and encourage new users, the flyers advertising the event could also be changed to tell a little bit about GNU/Linux and include some teasers. One idea: “Tired of Windows crashes? Tired of viruses? Tired of paying $150 or more for an operating system? What if there was a stable, secure alternative that didn't cost you a dime? One that you can try without changing anything on your current system? Come and join us on <date> <time> at <location> to learn more. OCLUG can help you try GNU/Linux or even install it on your laptop or desktop computer for you. It can be installed alongside your current Windows installation, so you don't have to change your current setup.”
- *Sometimes a group of “customers” was very far apart in skill level - e.g. one absolute beginner and one intermediate user - so that when one was asking a question, the other was left either not understanding what was said or else bored with the elementary discussion.**
- Suggestion: Banners such as “Beginners” and “Intermediate users” in different parts of the room to help “customers” know where to go to get the most out of the ongoing discussion.
- *Many people asked where they could get GNU/Linux, OpenOffice, or a website to help introduce them to GNU/Linux. One frequent question was whether OpenOffice will save in Microsoft Word format. Another was what other common Windows software equivalents there are, e.g. Adobe Acrobat Professional.**
- Suggestion: Flyers with a listing of helpful websites, like Distrowatch.com, OpenOffice.org, Linux-Mag.com, etc. that they can pick up for later reference. They could include a short blurb about OpenOffice explaining that they can use it to create and edit documents in Microsoft Office formats. Even more pertinent might be a little chart showing the name of a piece of Windows software, the name of a GNU/Linux-based alternative, and the website where it can be found. Example: Adobe Photoshop | GIMP | gimp.org <EDIT: I found one such chart here: http://www.linuxlinks.com/article/20070701111340544/Equivalents.html >
- *Several people asked about whether GNU/Linux has programming support. Examples: Java, C++**
- Suggestion: Flyers with a blurb about how robust GNU/Linux programming tools are, listing of some popular programming languages and perhaps names of some packages associated with those languages, to get them started.

'''No one knew we had liveCD's for their use.'''

- Suggestion: A banner such as “Literature and Free Discs,” designating a desk area near the entrance where all liveCDs, brochures, flyers, etc. would be in plain view for them to pick up.

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