



Australian Government

Department of Finance and Deregulation

Open Source Software Overview November 2007.

The Department of Finance and Administration approached the market in October 2006 to undertake a 'Free and Open Source Software survey of Australian Government agencies' (FIN06AGI013). The tender was awarded to the Australian Service for Knowledge of Open Source Software (ASK-OSS), Access Macquarie Limited.

The subsequent survey was undertaken in February and March 2007 with the objective being to determine the usage, impact and adoption of Open Source Software (OSS) solutions in Australian Government agencies.

The structure of the survey was designed to gather information from both an information and communication technology (ICT) management and technical perspective. A total of 108 agencies were invited to participate in the survey with 65 agencies responding, an overall response rate of 60%.

Some messages to come out of the survey were:

- 86% of agencies have a positive view of OSS and expect its usage to increase over the next 5 years;
- The vast majority of agency OSS usage is the back-end server environment;
- Agencies evaluate OSS on a fit for purpose, value for money basis. Assessing OSS functionality was the highest priority, not cost savings;
- The AGIMO "Guide to Open Source Software for Australian Government Agencies" is highly valued by agencies;
- Over 90% of respondents expected increased usage of OSS in the areas of Web applications, science and education, middleware and back office systems across all levels of the government;
- Agencies understand that by adopting OSS standards and solutions they could protect their investment in ICT systems, data and software;
- Over 90% of agencies believe that OSS and proprietary software can coexist productively;
- The three areas of most potential in using OSS solutions are Really Simple Syndication (RSS), the commonly used subscription format for blogs, news and updates, pod casting, inter/intranet content management systems and agency-specific core business applications. This indicates an interest in the uptake of enterprise class OSS solutions; and
- Agencies indicated their desire to be both vendor and format independent, with the high level of flexibility available to them by using OSS leading to an environment of innovation and transparency.

Some of the challenges identified by agencies when contemplating OSS were:

- OSS vendor support is perceived as problematic and was indicated as the biggest challenge facing OSS adoption by respondents;
- Obtaining relevant information on OSS for Government is difficult, and as a result, knowledge of OSS emerging technologies is low;
- Evaluating OSS solutions is difficult because of the perceived inability for agencies to trial the solutions.

As a first step in the OSS education of agencies and in an effort to answer the challenges identified in the survey, the Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO) held a Better Practice Seminar 'Open Source Software in Government: Innovation and Shared Experience' on 1 November 2007.

http://www.agimo.gov.au/practice/delivery/events/2007/nov_oss

The Better Practice Seminar featured case studies from agencies that are using OSS in their ICT environment and also considered some of the Intellectual Property (IP) and copyright issues that can arise when agencies use or promote OSS solutions.