



Rob Efrus is president of the Coalition for Enterprise Open Source Software in Government (CEOSSG), an organization that promotes adoption and utilization of open source

software on a government-wide basis and educates public officials on the differences between community and enterprise open source software. In this Q&A, Efrus discusses the benefits of enterprise open source and why government is uniquely positioned to expand open source software adoption.

Q: What's the difference between community open source software and enterprise open source software?

Efrus: Community open source software is what you traditionally think of as open source, where the community shares the source code, as well as updates to that source code. Enterprise open source is vendor supported. Enterprise vendors like Red Hat have taken community open source software and applications and created an ecosystem around them that enables better security, scalability and support.

Q: Why do you believe enterprise open source is a better choice for government than community open source?

Efrus: Enterprise open source is more secure. This is due to two factors. One, there's a much more regimented approach to patching. With the community versions of open source software, it's up to the community to identify and patch vulnerabilities. Government customers who use community versions of open source software rely on the community to identify vulnerabilities, create patches that address those vulnerabilities and make sure patching occurs on a regular basis. Enterprise vendors take a more disciplined and consistent approach to identifying vulnerabilities as well as patching.

Enterprise vendors also take steps to meet security benchmarks such as the Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS), which describe document processing, encryption algorithms and other information technology requirements for use within government agencies and by government contractors and vendors who work with those agencies.

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Q: Why is government uniquely positioned to expand adoption of enterprise open source software?

Efrus: Open source software is a great choice for government agency leaders who are working to modernize IT, move legacy applications to the cloud and enable mobile access to applications. These efforts require agencies to embrace things like agile development and DevOps. Because community open source software is now so pervasive, a government application developer can download code, which makes modernization projects easier, stimulates innovation and lowers the agency's overhead.

But while those "free downloads" can help government developers move faster, when enterprise applications are needed, the business case for enterprise open source becomes more powerful. In

short, the premium on innovation and agility that they get with community open source software goes away because enterprise applications are more complex and require more advanced security and scalability.

Q: What do government contracting or procurement officers need to know when considering open source solutions?

Efrus: They should consider the life cycle costs associated with modifying community versions of open source software versus buying an enterprise version. While the free downloads available via community open source software are the "easy button," the costs associated with modifying that software often far exceed the costs of buying an enterprise version right off the bat.