JOURNAL OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS APPLIED RESEARCH

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Open Source Software in the Vertical Market: An Open Niche?

Michael P. Conlon michael.conlon@sru.edu Computer Science Department, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania 16057, U.S.A.

Abstract

Much of the universe of open-source software is categorized; abundant open-source software is found for most categories. However, relatively few dual-licensed open-source software programs are found, and very little open-source software is found for vertical markets. Explanations are explored.

Keywords: open source, vertical market, horizontal market, dual license

1. INTRODUCTION

The phrase *open source* has been in common use since it was suggested in 1998 by Christine Peterson as an alternative name for what many call *free software* (Open Source Initiative, 2007). This paper is an attempt to categorize each package of a large sample of open source software, so as to discover the domains in which open source development has been occurring, and in which domains, if any, there has been little or no open source development activity.

Much of the earliest open source software consisted of systems software: programminglanguage processors, utility programs, database management systems, and operating system kernels. For example, the author first downloaded a Linux distribution, Soft Landing Systems (SLS) Linux in 1992. (A Linux distribution consists of the Linux kernel, essential utility software such as programs to list, edit, rename, and delete files, other system software, and applications.) The SLS distribution contained a kernel (v. 0.99pl12), the command-line utilities, several language processors, the X-Window System, several programming libraries, but virtually no application software. It was clear at the time

that, for Linux to become more-widely used, application software was needed.

Since then, much application software has been either written from scratch or has been opensourced from previously-proprietary software. There has been substantial progress in developing more and better system software as well. So what potential domains for open-source software remain unexplored? That is the question this paper attempts to answer.

2. HYPOTHESES

The first hypothesis is that, in spite of the large variety of open-source software, very little of it would be vertical market software, i.e., software designed to automate businesses of a particular type. Thus, software for dentists' offices or software for plumbing businesses would be considered vertical-market software.

The second hypothesis is that most general business software would be dual-licensed. Several programs commonly used in business, such as *MySQL*, use the dual-licensing model so that the community of users of the open-source-licensed version can contribute improvements to the software (cutting development costs), and the company can sell support to licensees of the

proprietary-licensed version (providing a revenue stream).

3. DEFINITIONS

Both the Association for Computing Machinery, (1998) and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (2011) have developed classification schemes for software. For the purposes of this paper, however, popular classification terms were deemed more appropriate.

Several such categories of software are wellestablished, with the definition of the category generally agreed-upon. Some other categories are not as well-defined, perhaps because they were coined as marketing terms rather than as scientific categories. This paper will first define the category names so there will be no confusion.

- Application software: software whose purpose is to solve users' problems. System software and application software are disjoint sets. Their union is the universe of software.
- Art & Entertainment: software for creating, playing, or viewing graphic art, video, and/or music, or for entertaining the user. This category includes most game software, but this study did not examine game software.
- Client: any software that requests services from servers. Clients are usually, but not always, interactive with users.
- Cloud: any software that provides applications to users via the Worldwide Web. Such applications traditionally would have been provided locally on the user's computer.
- Development software: software for creating, debugging, and/or maintaining software or websites.
- Dual licensed: software distributed under an open-source license that is also available under a proprietary (non-open-source) license, typically for a fee.
- General Business: software that typically would be used by businesses but not by individuals.
- Graphics: software that is used to view, generate, or modify graphical art, photographs, or diagrams.
- Horizontal market software: all software that is not vertical market software. Most horizontal market software would be of use to a variety of industries.
- Music: software that is used to listen to, generate, modify, or notate music.

- Operating System: An operating system kernel, or an operating system distribution (see below), provided the distribution is created by the entity that develops and maintains the kernel. This study does not include operating system distributions from third parties, since they are merely collections of software that may be examined separately.
- Operating system distribution: a collection of software distributed as a unit, consisting of an operating system kernel, essential utility programs such as programs to list, edit, rename, and delete files, other system software, and applications.
- PIM (Personal Information Manager): Email, calendar, collaborative communication, messaging, sticky note, and organizer software, etc., but not database managers.
- Productivity: word processors, spreadsheet programs, presentation programs, smalloffice database management systems, and PDF viewers.
- Server: any software that provides services to client software. Servers are never used by users directly; only client software may interact with a server.
- System software: software whose purpose is to manage the computer, maintain the computer and its file system, or to help develop and debug software.
- Utility: a program for maintenance or management of a computer system.
- Vertical market software: software that is specialized to a particular industry, and that fully automates a company in that industry, or nearly so. There is much software that is specialized to just one aspect of a particular industry, and, in this paper, such software is not considered vertical market software.
- Video: software that is used to view, generate, or modify moving images.
- Web: any software that is involved, in any way, with the Worldwide Web. Such software could be client software, server software, or Web-development software.

4. METHODOLOGY

Selecting Software

There is so much open-source software that it is impractical to study it all. Therefore, one must rely on a sample. Eric Raymond (2000) stated, "The Linux world...has terabytes of open sources generally available." Freshmeat.net (2011) claims that "Thousands of applications, which are preferably released under an open source license, are meticulously cataloged in the freshmeat database." And SourceForge (2011) claims to host 295,679 open-source projects.

While Freshmeat.net is the canonical listing of open-source software, it obtains its listings from the authors of the software, and so its listings are not vetted for utility, stability, practicality or popularity. Sourceforge serves as an archive for open-source projects, but a large fraction of its projects have had no activity for a substantial time (Rabellino, 2007), implying that they no traction among open-source obtained developers. Indeed, some have never reached version 1.0. Since this paper intends to study vibrant projects, the sample of software must be individuals or defined by organizations independent of the software's creators.

The author was able to find three independent lists of open-source software. Wikipedia (2011) and Harvey (2011) each listed a significant number of open-source packages, and all of them were included in this study. The *Google Summer of Code* (GSOC) (Google, 2011) has supported a large number of projects. All projects involved with GSOC 2005 and most from GSOC 2006 were studied.

For each selected open-source project, the author inspected the project Website and the Website of the referring site. Each site was analyzed to determine into which categories (from section *3* above) the project's software belonged. Not every Website supplied explicitly the information needed for this study. In the small number of cases where the Website was vague, the value for the category was inferred from contextual information in the Websites.

The Spreadsheet

Each open-source package is represented by a row in the spreadsheet. A column was created for each of many software categories, although *vertical market, horizontal market,* and *dual licensed* were of primary interest. If the package seemed to fit the category, a "Y" was entered into the cell at the junction of the package's row and the category's column.

5. RESULTS

As indicated in the table in the appendix, only 5% of the software packages in the sample of one hundred eighty-four were vertical-market software, confirming the hypothesis that open-

source vertical-market software would be rare. 5% of the packages in the sample is actually large compared with the percent of industries represented. The 2007 North American Industry Classification System (United States Census Bureau, 2011) lists 1,175 industry categories. Our sample identifies only five industries with open-source, vertical-market (OSVM) software: library, microfinance, tool-and-die, restaurant, and financial services. This computes to 0.43% of all industries.

Only eleven of the forty-nine (22%) of general business software were dual-licensed. Even if general business software where commercial hosting is available from the vendor is counted as dual-licensed, the figure is still only 33%, and the hypothesis that most general business software would be dual licensed is not supported by the data in this sample.

6. DISCUSSION

Vertical Market Software

What explains the scarcity of vertical market open-source software? Eric Raymond (2000) postulated that "Every good work of software starts by scratching a developer's personal itch." When the developer is a hobbyist, he is not likely to be itched by the desire to write dentistoffice software, and the chances are that he wouldn't know where to start, unless he were a dentist himself. If he is a dentist, and the software development project was successful, significant money might be earned by licensing the software to other dentists, an incentive to make the software proprietary. If he did make it open-source, he would be offering competitors the ability to operate as efficiently as he does, for no development or licensing cost: not a wise decision in a competitive industry. For a detailed discussion of the obstacles facing opensource projects in vertical markets, refer to Shaffer (2006).

Thus, the domain knowledge combined with the software design talent required to create good vertical market software must be a relatively rare combination, and those that have such knowledge have significant disincentives against open-sourcing their creation.

Nonetheless, this study did find several opensource, vertical-market packages. What factors led to their creation in the face of the abovementioned disincentives? Five of the ten were integrated library systems. (ILS's). Two others were microfinance software. Of the remainder, *Floreant POS* is point-of-sale software for restaurants, *Tool and Die ERP* is for tool-and-die companies, and *OpenGamma* is for financial analytics at investment companies.

The existence of the library information systems is easy to explain. As the former treasurer of a small-town, one-room public library, the author was greatly disturbed by the \$2000 annual ILS license fee, particularly since this was one-sixth of the library's annual budget. Vertical-market software is notoriously high-priced, and these prices create a significant incentive for a library to find a more economical source for ILS software.

The principles of library operation are more generally understood than those of less-public ventures, so there should be more people competent to create an ILS than, for example, an integrated dentist-office system. As nonprofit organizations or government entities, libraries would not find it appropriate to initiate a profit-making software business. Additionally, and unlike for-profit firms, libraries do not generally compete with one another; therefore, a library that creates its own ILS would not be at any disadvantage should other libraries adopt their software. Under an open-source regime, the library that initiates the ILS software project may find their software enhanced by other libraries, with all user-libraries reaping the benefits. Thus many obstacles to the creation of open-source vertical-market software do not exist in the library domain.

The Koha ILS illustrates this. Horowhenua Library Trust (HLT), which manages several public libraries in New Zealand, faced the Y2K problem on their existing ILS. They distributed an RFP for a replacement system, but found nothing adequate and affordable among the submitted bids. Thereupon, they decided to create a new open-source ILS from scratch, and hired Katipo Communications, a Web software development firm, to help them create it. The new software became operational in just over fifteen weeks, through intense cooperation between Katipo and HLT's librarians. They called it Koha, and they created it for 40% of the cost of the average turnkey solution (Ransom, Cormack, and Blake, 2009).

Other libraries worldwide have contributed improvements to Koha, and all the libraries that use it can take advantage of the enhanced software. HLT, at relatively low initial cost, has broken free of the lock-in and concomitant high licensing fees of proprietary ILS's, and has acquired a high-quality, free (from onerous licensing conditions), open-source ILS (Ransom et. al., 2009).

In addition to the five ILS's, two microfinance programs were found: *Mifos* and *Octopus*. Mifos was developed by the Grameen Foundation, and Octopus by the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED). Both organizations are charitable organizations rather than profitmaking businesses, and their goal is to promote microfinance.

Tool and Die ERP is enterprise resource management software for the tool and die industry. It was created under the sponsorship of the European Union to help improve the competitiveness of European tool-and-die firms. As a government project, the *Tool and Die ERP* project had no concerns about inadvertently sharing competitive advantage with other firms.

Each of the projects discussed thus far seems to owe its success to its immunity to the disincentives that generally stifle open-source vertical-market (OSVM) software. Are there any other circumstances under which OSVM software can arise?

FloreantPOS is a point-of-sale system for restaurants. It was developed by Moonrank U.S.A., a Web software development firm. Their Website does not reveal the motivation for FloreantPOS's development, but it does seem that Moonrank expects to profit by providing support (Moonrank, 2011). FloreantPOS claims at least one major restaurant chain, Denny's, as a client. It is not clear how FloreantPOS has overcome the disincentives against OSVM. Perhaps restaurants, or at least those restaurants that are FloreantPOS users, consider their food and ambiance greater differentiators than their IT systems. Attempts to contact Moonrank for further information were unsuccessful.

The last OSVM to be discussed is an interesting new project that has been initiated by OpenGamma, a startup company. OpenGamma is developing software for the front office and risk analysis functions of Wall Street firms. They believe that these functions have become sufficiently standardized that they no longer provide significant competitive advantage to Wall-Street firms, and that it will be cheaper for companies to use OpenGamma's open-source program and pay for support than to license third-party software or develop and maintain their own (Woods, 2011). They will depend on dual-licensing and confidentiality agreements to assure their clients that their trade secrets will not be compromised.

As of the date of writing, September 2011, OpenGamma has not reached version 1.0, (OpenGamma, 2011a), and until that point is reached, one would not expect it to be used as a production system. The OpenGamma Website indicates that they are "trialing it with a number of financial institutions" (OpenGamma 2011b), but that is no guarantee that any significant institutions will become production users. While venture-capitalists are betting on OpenGamma, the low success rate of VC-funded firms, about 45% (Davis, 2008) precludes any assumption that VC funding necessarily predicts success.

Dual-licensed Software

There appears to be a relative scarcity of duallicensed open-source software. MySQL, SugarCRM, Zimbra, and Bacula are high-profile dual-licensed open-source projects. As profitmaking endeavors, these projects need to stimulate public interest through advertising and press releases. Hearing about such projects regularly may leave the impression that duallicensed projects are more common than they actually are.

Dual-licensing software is a proposed solution to the problem of making profits from free, opensource software. The rapid rise of MySQL showed that such a business model could both generate profits and produce rapidly-improving software. MySQL's success also gave the model significant exposure, leading other enterprises to imitate. However, this survey suggests that there are not very many companies replicating MySQL's success.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Open-source software has limited penetration into the vertical-market world. Most of the existing OSVM software rely on government sponsorship or their situation in a noncompetitive industry for their success. However, there are OSVM applications for competitive markets, and at least one of these has met with significant acceptance. It seems likely that open-source software will move further into vertical markets only if exceptions are found to the disincentives to OSVM software.

The exceptions so far identified include

- a) government or non-profit sponsorship,
 b) territorially-segregated or other noncompetitive markets,
- c) ability to profit from selling support,
- d) potential cost savings from avoiding license fees of proprietary software and sharing the development burden with your industry, and, perhaps,
- e) maturing technology eliminating the competitive advantage of proprietary software technology.

In those cases where several of these factors are present, the emergence of open-source software in that vertical market would be more likely.

Firm conclusions about dual-licensed software are harder to come by. It could be that MySQL's success owed much to timing: arising just as the World-Wide Web and e-commerce were emerging, when an alternative to expensive and bloated commercial databases was particularly needed, MySQL met a need.

It may be that users of open-source software distrust mixed-model (another term for duallicensing) companies, but that the need was so great at MySQL's emergence that the partproprietary aspect was overlooked. It is certainly possible that other software might find a similar niche at emergence, and so there are other successful dual-licensed projects. However, if this conjecture is true, a mixedmodel project should find it hard to compete against a pure, community-developed opensource project. It would be intriguing to study the several dual-license projects, and their competitive environment, to elucidate which ones are truly successful and why.

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| Description | Compress/archive utility | Word processor | ERP software | instant messaging client | Content management system | Backup utility | Web server | Audio/music processor | Backup utility | Invoicing software | Molecular modeling and dynamics | Digital PBX (VOIP) | Audio/music processor | Molecular modeling | Backup utility | Bio/Chem Informatics | Bioinformatics | 3D graphics software | Programming language compiler | Double-entry bookkeeping | Programming libraries for C++ | Content management system | eCommerce software | Microscope image processing s/w | chemintormatics library | web browser | video editing software | Anti-virus litter for servers General-purnose network server | Groupware | Jnix printing system | ERP & CRM software | Content management system | Diagramming tool | Web framework (CMS?) | Javascript toolkit | Content management system | ntegrated development environment | ERP software | Accounting and business mgmt. s/w | Imesheet management | -irewaii Airroscone image proc'ing anns & lib | wiccoscope intage procing appa a no FRP software | antantatad Library Svetam | Personal information manager | udio/udoo programming libraru | Microscope image processing s/w |
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Appendix

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| Peazip | | > : | 1 | > : | > | 2 | | | | | + | + | + | \downarrow | | | | - | org | File and archive manager utility |
| Perl | | > : | + | > | + | > | 3 | 3 | | ; | ; | - | + | \downarrow | | | | - | | Programming language interpreter |
| phpGroupWare | | > > | + | + | + | | > > | ~ | | > > | > > | > | > > | + | | | + | - | rojects/phpgroupware | Groupware |
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| PrestaShop | | - > | + | + | + | \downarrow | - | - > | | - | + | + | - | \downarrow | | > | 1 | ť | tashop.com | retal e-commerce souware |
| PyMol | | > > | ľ | _ | + | > | | ~ | | | + | + | + | \downarrow | | > | + | Ť | | Molecular modeling |
| Python OC&D | | - > | - | <u> </u> | + | - | | > | | | + | + | + | > | | > | | 1 | 6 | Programming language compiler |
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| Quickrixid | Ť | - > | + | + | + | - | \downarrow | > | T | \dagger | + | + | + | \downarrow | | > | \dagger | Ť | tra nat | Molecular modeling |
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| Software | Type Vertical Market | Horizontal Market | tnemnishetnaßhA | məteye | Operating System | Development | Development Server | Application | Client | M éb | pnolO | Productivity | WId | ssenisu8 Imeneo | Dual License | Graphics | oəbiV | oieuM | 3 | Web Resource | Description |
|------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------|------------------|---------------|-----------------------|-------------|-----------|---|--------|--------------|----------|-----------------|--------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| RasMol | | ≻ | | - | | - | | > | | | | | | | ~ | > | | | www.rasmol.org | | Molecular modeling |
| Rosegarden | | ≻ | × | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | | 7 | | | | | | | | 7 | | × | www.rosegardenmusic.com | usic.com | Music processor |
| Ruby | | ≻ | \vdash | > | \vdash | F | ~ | \vdash | \vdash | | | | F | \vdash | \vdash | ┞ | \vdash | \vdash | www.ruby-lang.org | | Object-oriented scripting language |
| Scribus | | ≻ | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | 7 | | | | | \vdash | \vdash | ╞ | > | | \vdash | www.scribus.net | | Desktop publishing software |
| ShoutCast | | ≻ | > | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | > | > | | \vdash | | | t | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | > | www.shoutcast.com/broadcast-tools | m/broadcast-tools | Internet "radio" station software |
| Simple Invoices | | ≻ | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | 7 | ≻ | > | > | ≻ | | t | ≻ | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | www.simpleinvoices.org | | Invoicing software |
| SimPy | | ≻ | F | ≻ | ╞ | ŕ | ~ | ┡ | ┡ | L | L | | F | \vdash | ╞ | ┞ | | \vdash | simpy.sourceforge.net | | Discrete event simulation package |
| Siwapp | | ≻ | \square | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | 7 | > | | 7 | > | | | × | \vdash | \vdash | | | www.siwapp.org | | Invoicing software |
| Sonar | | Y | - | Y | \vdash | ~ | × | | | Y | Y | | | \vdash | | | | | www.sonarsource.org | org | Code quality management software |
| SplendidCRM | | > | \square | \square | \square | \vdash | > | > | 7 | 7 | > | | | 7 | ~ | | | | www.splendidcrm.com | com | CRM software |
| SQL-Ledger | | ≻ | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | 7 | > | | 7 | 7 | | | ` ≻ | 7 | | | | www.sql-ledger.com | m | Ledger and ERP software |
| Subversion | | > | | > | ^ | ~ | × | | \square | | | | | \square | \vdash | \vdash | | | subversion.apache.org | :.org | Distributed version control system |
| SugarCRM | | ۲ | | | | | × | Υ. | | Y | Y | | | × | Y | | | | www.sugarcrm.com | | CRM software |
| The GIMP | | ≻ | ≻ | \vdash | | \vdash | | > | | | | | | | | > | | | www.gimp.org | | Raster graphics editor |
| Thunderbird | | ≻ | | | | - | | × | 7 | | | ≻ | ≻ | | | | | | www.mozillamess | www.mozillamessaging.com/en-US/thunderbird | Personal information manager |
| TimeTrex | | ≻ | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | > | > | | > | ≻ | | \vdash | ~ | ~ | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | www.timetrex.com | | Worker time and attendance tracker |
| Tinker | | ≻ | | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | - | > | | | | | | | | ~ | | | dasher.wustl.edu/tinker | inker | Molecular dynamics |
| Tk/Tkl | | ≻ | | 7 | \vdash | <u>_</u> | - | \vdash | | | | | | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | | | tcl.sourceforge.net | | Programming language interpreter |
| Tool and Die ERP | × | | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | ~ | > | | | | | | \vdash | \vdash | | | | toolanddie.sourceforge.net | orge.net | ERP for tool-and-die companies |
| Tryton | | Y | \square | | \square | \square | Y | Υ. | Y | | | | | Υ | \square | | | | www.tryton.org | | ERP software |
| TurboCash | | Y | | | | | | Y | | | | | | × | Y | | | | turbocash.net | | SMB finances software |
| TuxType | | ≻ | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | | 7 | | | | | | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | | | tux4kids.alioth.debian.org/tuxtype/ | ian.org/tuxtype/ | Typing tutor |
| NGENE | | ≻ | | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | \vdash | > | | | > | | | | \vdash | ~ | | | ugene.unipro.ru | | Bioinformatics |
| Umbrello | | ≻ | | 7 | \vdash | ^ | ~ | | | | | | | | \vdash | 7 | | | www.umbrello.org | | CASE software |
| Untangle | | Y | - | Y | Y | ~ | Y | _ | | | | | | - | Y | | | | www.untangle.com | _ | Network mgmt. server |
| VoltDB | | 7 | - | Y | \vdash | _ | × ~ | | | | | | | | ~ | | | | voltdb.com | | Database management system |
| vTiger | | ≻ | _ | _ | _ | _ | > | > | | > | ≻ | | | ~ | | | | | www.vtiger.com | | CRM software |
| webERP | | ~ | | | + | | > | > | | > | > | | | ~ | \neg | | | | www.weberp.org | | ERP software |
| WinAmp | | > | | | | | | > | | | | | | | ~ | | | > | www.winamp.com | | Digital audio player |
| Wine | | ≻ | | ≻ | _ | _ | | | | | | | | | > | | | | www.winehq.og | | Windows compatibilty layer |
| World Wind | | 7 | | | | | ~ | > | | | | | | | | 7 | | | www.freeearthfoundation.com | idation.com | Virtual globe server (GIS) |
| xTuple PostBooks | | ٢ | | | | | Y | 7 | Y | | | | | Υ | ٢ | | | | www.xtuple.com | | ERP software |
| Xwiki | | > | | | | | ~ | > | | 7 | | | | | | | | | www.xwiki.org | | Wiki development platform & apps |
| Zen Cart | | 7 | \square | | $\left \right $ | \vdash | 7 | > | | 7 | > | | | Y | \vdash | | | | www.zen-cart.com | | E-commerce shopping-cart software |
| Zentyal | | ≻ | - | ۔ ۲ | Y | \vdash | Y | _ | | Y | Y | | | \vdash | | | | | www.zentyal.org | | SMB multipurpose server |
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| Fraction | c0. | 5 | | .33 | .03 | 1 | 20 .3 | .39 .71 | 11. 1 | 1 .33 | 3.27 | .03 | 9 | . 12. | 9. | Z. 10. | .21 .03 | d0. 5 | | | |