



Guiding Ohio Online

Level Up: Open Source Software

Open Source Software (OSS) is type of computer software that allows the user to look at or change the source code. Imagine you were an auto mechanic. Normal computer software is like a car that you can't open the hood. Open Source Software is like a regular car, a skilled operator can go in a tinker. Also, it is usually free or low-cost. Here are some important advantages and disadvantages to open source software:

Key Advantages:

- No cost or a lower cost for licensing "open source" solutions.
- Flexibility to adapt the software for particular needs.
- Continuing software enhancements available through the open source community.
- Open architecture allows for greater opportunities for collaboration.
- Ability to incorporate tools for particular needs.
- Many pre-existing tools for interface and reporting already developed.
- Tools make it easier to build generic rather than custom interfaces.

Key Disadvantages:

- Often no single source to support all aspects of the application; multiple sources of technical support may be required.
- Must understand business logic and coding to make adjustments to meet unique location work flow.
- User assumes more "ownership" of the solution than under proprietary licenses, including initiation of upgrades, enhancements, configuration and support of software.
- Often have to adapt and develop training materials appropriate for the particular application of the open source solution.

- OSS updates frequently, your IT department may get tired of updating it.¹

Choose one open-source or free technology. Some suggestions are: Scratch (scratch.mit.edu/), Android App Inventor (appinventor.mit.edu/), GIMP (www.gimp.org/), Audacity (audacity.sourceforge.net/), Inkscape (<http://sourceforge.net/projects/inkscape/>), or Open Office (<https://www.openoffice.org/>). If possible, work with your host library's IT department to download this software on to a staff terminal. If you are unable to download software due to network restrictions, try a free web-based solution instead such as one of Mozilla's webmaker tools. (<https://webmaker.org/tools>)

Play with the software. What's easy to use or understand about it? What will be a challenge to learners?

¹ Adapted from:

<http://www.hrsa.gov/healthit/toolbox/HealthITAdoptiontoolbox/OpenSource/softwareadvantage.html>

Would this meet a digital literacy need in your community? Why or why not?

If the above answer is yes, talk to your IT department and site supervisor. Weigh the pros and cons.

Do the pros outweigh the cons of implementing this Open Source Software?