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## EDITOR'S NOTE:

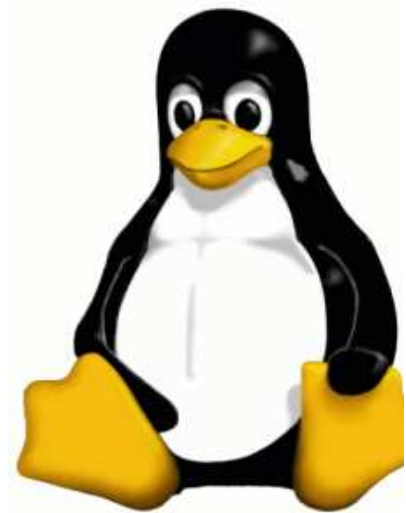
### What is this Thing you Call “FOSS?”

Free and Open Source Software (“FOSS”) is not the easiest concept to understand, even for technology folks when they first happen upon it. For legislators, it’s even harder to get their brains around something (like Linux) that isn’t geographically “from” anywhere, is created in real time by a global network of volunteers, isn’t owned by any one entity, is available for free – and has been compared by a certain prominent technology CEO to a manifestation of communist principles. As you can imagine, all that unfamiliarity doesn’t help when FOSS competes with proprietary software in the government procurement process.

But because of the ever increasing number of superior FOSS solutions that are available, it is essential that governments – national, state and local – give equal consideration to FOSS alternatives to proprietary software, if these public servants wish to responsibly spend the tax dollars of those that put them in office.

It is for this reason that I am dedicating this fifth and final issue in a series focusing on the standards-related needs of the Obama administration’s technology-based policies to the phenomenon of FOSS. My hope is that this issue will provide a useful reference for those legislators, and their staff, who need to become familiar with FOSS, perhaps for the first time.

I begin that task with my **Editorial**, which highlights the hazards of ignoring FOSS in situations where it provides the best tool to perform a given job. I also call on the Obama Administration to publicly declare its commitment to giving equal priority to FOSS alternatives in public procurement, to ensure that government CIOs have the support they deserve when choosing FOSS



[Tux, the Linux Mascot](#), by  
Larry Ewing

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over proprietary solutions in the highly competitive, often rough and tumble, procurement process.

The **Feature Article** in this issue is intended to support government CIOs in a different way, by providing those on the Hill with a comprehensive overview of FOSS: what it is, where it comes from, and how to use it, all in one place. My hope is that this concise but broad reaching survey will prove to be a useful guide for decision makers that may have found it challenging in the past to understand what FOSS is, and why they should care.

I follow with a “twofer” **Standards Blog** selection, occasioned by Microsoft’s launch of a new non-profit organization (the CodePlex Foundation) intended to facilitate the interaction of commercial companies and individual developers in FOSS projects. The purpose of this two part series was to explain the types of governance and development mechanisms that the founders of a FOSS project need to put in place in order to successfully attract the kinds of participants, and enable the types of activities, essential to make such an enterprise succeed.

My **Consider This** piece closes on a different note, sparked by the release of Dan Brown’s latest blockbuster symbologist mystery. In it, I show that when it comes to ancient religious intrigues with long-lasting effects, Brown’s imagination comes in second to facts – and standards.

As always, I hope you enjoy this issue. But either way, it’s always great to hear what you think. Let me know, why don’t you?

Andrew Updegrove  
Editor and Publisher  
2005 ANSI President's  
Award for Journalism

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