

Want to Contribute to an Open Source CMMS?

Written by Terrence O'Hanlon, ReliabilityWeb.com
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Think about how most computerized maintenance management system software packages are developed. A software developer or a group of software developers are hired by BigTime-CMMS Inc., given a set of specifications, and set about writing all the code that results in the latest version of your CMMS.

In a perfect world, this would result in software that makes managing maintenance activities and maintenance information a breeze.

In a recent CMMS Best Practice benchmarking survey conducted at Reliabilityweb.com and Maintenancebenchmarking.com completed by more than 650 participants, only 20 percent reported satisfaction with their CMMS implementation. Over half reported that the CMMS failed to generate the expected return on investment. There is a severe disconnect between what the market wants and what commercial CMMS software delivers.

Now think about how many times your Windows operating system has crashed. If we are PC users, we all think that Windows is the only operating system we can use. We also know that we have very little influence on the quality and features of current and future versions of Windows. Mr. Gates has decided not to let us have access to the source code so we can change it or make improvements. That is perfectly within his rights as the creator and owner of the software.

Linux is open source system

If you read anything about computers, you have probably heard of Linux, a free "open source" operating system for PCs and Web servers. It is quickly gaining ground on Windows because in some ways, it is simply better. There is a thriving community of programmers who work on improving Linux in their spare time and they have created an operating system that poses a serious threat to Microsoft. IBM and Dell now offer Linux operating system options.

According to Eric Raymond's "[The Cathedral and the Bazaar](#)", "The developer who uses only his or her own brain in a closed project is going to fall behind the developer who knows how to create an open, evolutionary context in which feedback exploring the design space, code contributions, bug-spotting, and other improvements comes from hundreds (perhaps thousands) of people.

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“Linux was the first project for which a conscious and successful effort to use the entire world as its talent pool was made. No closed-source developer can match the pool of talent the Linux community can bring to bear on a problem.”

Develops own CMMS

If you are now feeling inspired about open source software, meet Chris Morris, a plant engineer for a food company who developed an open source CMMS out of sheer necessity. According to Morris, “When the money for a commercial CMMS was chopped from my budget, I picked up a PHP/MySQL book and intended to write a bare bones work order system. I got a bit carried away and soon realized that the quality and functionality of commercial CMMSs were not beyond my reach.

“I decided to release the code as open source hoping that others would find the program useful and contribute to its development. Commercial CMMS packages typically cost upwards of \$10,000. I think within a year, open source CMMS can implement 80 percent of the functionality of most commercial packages at (if my major in math serves correctly) 0 percent of the cost.”

Morris and a couple other maintenance managers/engineers are working on this open source web-based CMMS. If you are interested in a CMMS that costs nothing, comes with full source code, runs on a variety of platforms, and requires only a standards compliant web browser (IE, Mozilla, Netscape, Opera, etc.) on the client, then check out the project at <http://free-cmms.sf.net>

This is not a hacked together MS Access program. It uses the PHP and MySQL database (both free, open source software packages).

In development stage

Morris asked us to mention that this is not a mature application ready for deployment (note that I said de-ploy-ment not de-velop-ment). It is currently a seed, developed as a proof of concept to attract developers and user feedback. Unless major resources are devoted to its development, it will probably take another year to get ready for general use.

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Morris encourages readers to check out the application (there is a demo at the web site), then check out the code. PHP is an easy language to learn and modifications are encouraged. For those noncoders reading this, you should know that the open source nature of the project means that you will never be dependent on any single vendor to support the product. Feature requests and suggestions on the user interface and design are encouraged.

This open source CMMS is far from complete but, according to its authors, it can replace a paper work order system and scheduled PMs are coming soon. It is released under the GPL license, and is free to use and free to modify (see the GPL license at www.gnu.org/copyleft/gpl.html).

If you have a knack for programming and are interested in an open source CMMS made by plant maintenance personnel for plant maintenance personnel visit <http://free-cmms.sf.net> . **MT**