Radio Days – 2008-09-20

Tip of the Week — Microsoft and Brainwashing

Some months ago Jan from Axedale rang and asked about a free program to replace her copy of 602 Software's spreadsheet. I suggested that she downloaded OpenOffice as it had the best free replacement for Microsoft's Excel spreadsheet program that I know of. OpenOffice is near to releasing a new version (Version 3) of OpenOffice, and it has some major changes by all accounts.

This will do everything that Microsoft Office will do, but it does not carry Microsoft's hundreds of dollars cost: it is free for the downloading. At 127 MB it takes me about half an hour to download with broadband, and will take a day or two for a person with a reasonably fast dial-up internet connection. This suite of programs (word processor, spreadsheet, graphics, presentations and database) is the equivalent of Microsoft Office and will do far more than the average person will need, yet we have been so brainwashed that we insist on spending hundreds of dollars buying the Microsoft product.

When will we learn that free (especially software) can be as good as, and often better than, the almost equivalent expensive?

Documents: Open Office vs Microsoft Office

OpenOffice is a suite of office programs, just like Microsoft Office. The major difference is that Microsoft Office has grown like Topsy from a number of products. Some of these products were written by Microsoft and some were purchased from other companies. This means that the quality varies dramatically, and this can be seen most obviously in Microsoft Office 2007, where Word and Excel use the new ribbon interface and all the other programs use the old way of controlling the program.

Many people want to know about free programs. Last week we spoke about Rod who said that I had given him incorrect details about a free program, so he downloaded a program which would only fix 5 problems out of 900. There was a full version which would do the rest but that would cost money, and he objected to paying for a supposedly-free program, yet how many people insist on using expensive Microsoft products when there are many excellent free programs which will do everything that they want. Examples abound: Linux instead of Microsoft Windows, OpenOffice instead of Microsoft Office, the GIMP instead of Adobe Photoshop. The list goes on and on.

Perhaps it is time that we started to insist that we use, and our schools teach our children how to use, these alternative programs which will help reduce the balance of payments problems we have in the process. If we all spent one tenth of the cost of programs which we buy and gave that money to the people who give us such good free software we would have better quality programs and more money. Isn't that something to be aiming for?

Websites

Ubuntu Linux	www.ubuntu.com
Open Office	www.openoffice.org
The GIMP	www.gimp.org