
Open source software has become so commonly used in libraries that many would argue that a book describing it is redundant. Nicole C. Engard's Practical Open Source Software for Libraries provides compelling evidence against that argument. The book builds on information that is collected in directory sites such as http://oss4lib.org and the more recent http://foss4lib.org/ but offers a more comprehensive guide to the spectrum of open source applications that are currently used in libraries. These two sites focus on developer tools much more than Engard's book, which covers desktop, end-user applications such as web browsers, desktop publishing applications, and audio editing tools (while also covering web servers, content management systems, online course management systems, and integrated library systems). This contrast is consistent with Engard's intended audience – general librarians who "will be able to speak to [their] colleagues about open source software and make practical suggestions for software improvements in [their] library" (xxv) after reading her book.

Engard divides Practical Open Source Software for Libraries into two parts. The first is an overview of what open source software is, and the second contains detailed coverage of specific applications. The first, which contains chapters defining open source, on the role and importance of community surrounding open source software, and on how open source fits into library culture and organizational frameworks, is disappointing. In general, the first part lacks the detail and thoroughness found throughout the second part. For example, the section "The costs of open source", one of the most complex aspects of implementing open source solutions in libraries, is less than a page long. This section is a missed opportunity to compare the costs of using open source applications to those of using proprietary, commercial applications. Total cost of ownership is alluded to in a later section, "Library budgets", but not in great detail. Similarly, in the chapter on "Community and open source", the section "Health of the community" is another missed opportunity: detailed guidance on how to evaluate an application's user, support, and developer communities would be invaluable here. The brief chapter "Debunking the myths" is the most detailed in the first part of the book and does a commendable job of countering the fear, uncertainty, and doubt (FUD) that libraries often encounter. More detail or, ideally, a couple of case studies would have made this section more effective.

The second part, which provides in-depth coverage of specific open source applications, is where the book excels. The range of applications Engard covers is impressive and strikes an effective balance between general introduction and detailed analysis. The applications covered include operating systems; productivity suites; web browsers; email clients; instant messaging apps; media applications such as photo, audio, and desktop publishing tools; web servers; content management systems and wikis; repository platforms; subject guide tools; link resolvers; discovery layers; and integrated library systems. Wow! Engard's descriptions of the applications are clear and detailed and never include redundant information. One of the best features of Engard's
book is that coverage of each application includes excerpts from interviews with librarians who use the software on a regular basis. These interviews are candid, thoughtful, and suitably detailed and are worth the price of the book alone.

The interviews in part two, and Engard's descriptive coverage of software applications, are complemented by a 37-page appendix detailing the results of a survey of 977 people who use open source software in libraries. This appendix makes interesting reading, as it vividly illustrates the wide-ranging opinions library staff have about open source software, community, and culture.

Overall, Practical Open Source Software for Libraries is effective at what it sets out to do, but the imbalance between parts one and two is stark. The lack of detail in part one is unfortunate, because, as Engard herself points out a number of times, open source software is about much more than the applications themselves. It is also about the cultural and organizational benefits that result from adopting open source technology. At a time when many proprietary software vendors are scrambling to hang on to their old markets, librarians need to advocate for the use of open source software in libraries in ways other than just being able to recommend an excellent productivity suite or content management system. While Practical Open Source Software for Libraries makes the benefits of open source software clear, deeper coverage of some of these benefits would have been useful.

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Editor's Note: A bias is not detected in this review; however, in terms of full disclosure, Simon Fraser University does develop and support the reSearcher suite (http://researcher.sfu.ca/), which is covered in this book.