

**It is a delight to be here with you all today at Computers in Libraries, April 2008.**

Howard County Library finds open source software to be perfectly at home within the library profession - where access to information is free and unrestricted.

I am going to start with an assumption -- **the assumption is that you will use open source solutions.**

The best way to truly get what the open source world "is" is to read the *Cathedral and the Bazaar* by Eric S. Raymond or watch Revolution OS. How I explain it quickly is best said in my recent *Computers in Libraries* article (which I was flattered was chosen for publication) - "Open source software is designed and maintained by a community of users. Open source software includes free distribution of the source code and is technology neutral."

If you have not yet read my *Computers in Libraries* article, my mother has many extra copies of the March issue and I will have her mail you one.

To summarize, Howard County Library has 300 customer computers running entirely, 100% open source solutions (except for Adobe Reader, which is free, but not open source.) About 70% (or 215) of our staff machines are also running open source and Adobe Reader. Our remaining staff remain on Windows XP because of our current integrated library system's use of client-server technology. Our marketing department is a MAC shop. We are in the midst of a migration to Koha Zoom; we are enjoying the freedom to design staff and customer interfaces exactly as we like and we are exhilarated by direct access to our entire data set / data structure / etc.

The project planning involved is identical to what you do when you add any new service to your system. The decisions are focused on customer first and the goal is always to control costs while delivering solid, reliable, and professional service. The best steps in project management for any IT project, are, in my opinion, to be transparent and to share information readily, to be honest, and at times, to be self-effacing in order to put others at ease.

**When you do deploy an open source solution, the burden you will face will not be technical. You will face emotional turmoil because you are going to change how things are done.**

**An open source deployment may result in you changing how you approach things**

With open source software, you don't BUY anything. You get software for free and if you want to, you pay for expertise or know-how to make it work. Or you use the software and don't ever need a lick of technical help.

With open source software, you aren't told what to do nor are you told what you can't do - you can, in theory, do nearly anything you want. If we are honest, it is easier to be told what you

cannot do.

With open source products, some buttons are in different places. Sometimes, you have to click 2 times to do something that in another application, you only click once. Often, you only have to click once to do something that another application required 3 clicks for, but it is interesting, folks don't remember that as much as I'd like.

Finally, and related to the clicking example, the instant things don't work with open source software, some users get extremely agitated. When reporting a browser shut down on Firefox, I had someone tell me with a straight face, that he "never" had a machine running a proprietary operating system crash or freeze on them! Come on .... computers are annoying things that sometimes freeze up.

**So, today I want to talk about the the dirty underside of what Howard County Library is doing; I want to tell you about the areas where we have found discomfort.**

In doing so, I will do two things which may make some of you uncomfortable; I will get personal and tell you a bit about myself AND I will make a few generalizations about those of us who work in libraries. Please see these generalizations as they are intended -- scenarios.

I will use three statements, rooted in assumptions, to talk about emotional turmoil.

(\* we are information professionals; **we must know it all!**

(\* it has always been this way; **others just don't understand!**

(\* it is a bad idea; **of course it will fail!**