

WHITE PAPER



Why Choose an Open Source BPM?

Open source has become so strategic to mainstream businesses that it now rivals proprietary competitors. See how open source BPM offers key advantages over proprietary BPM.

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1. Unlocking the Full Potential of BPM

Over the past two decades, the Business Process Management (BPM) software segment has developed into a two billion dollar global market¹ comprised of multiple vendors in many different countries. The BPM market continues to grow as organizations seek ever-greater efficiency, especially in the current economic climate. IDC predicts the BPM software market to grow at a 13.4% CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) between 2008 and 2013. Unfortunately, the promise of improving, automating, and measuring processes throughout organizations of all sizes remains largely unrealized. The primary obstacles to delivering the promise of BPM to every person in every organization include:

- Cost of BPM software and its deployment
- Rigidity of BPM products in terms of development and deployment
- Innovation in bringing BPM-related benefits to every person in the organization

Open source BPM software offers ways to overcome these obstacles. In the traditional proprietary software model, customers license the use of the software from a vendor. While the source code of a proprietary program is a closely guarded trade secret, open source software takes the opposite philosophy—the code of an open source program is freely available for anyone to critique, modify, or rebuild. Open source has long been recognized as a preferred vehicle for disruptive innovation (e.g., the World Wide Web and more recently in Big Data technologies such as Hadoop and the many flavors of NoSQL). Open source has become so strategic to mainstream businesses that it now rivals proprietary competitors. Specifically, this white paper discusses how open source BPM offers the following advantages over proprietary BPM:

Open source has long been recognized as a preferred vehicle for disruptive innovation

- Transparency
- Vastly greater cost-effectiveness
- More diverse ecosystem
- More flexibility
- Greater innovation

BPM (Business Process Management) is a means of defining and managing what happens, from beginning to end, in a “business process.” A business process is any sequence of activity of interest to an organization. Some examples of business processes include:

- A new employee is hired at a company: There are actions to be taken before, during, and after the employee’s arrival
- A user with a computer problem contacts a premium helpdesk service: The problem must be logged, tracked, resolved, and documented.

¹ Source: Gartner’s Magic Quadrant for Business Process Management Suites published on Oct 18, 2010

- A customer brings a car that has been recalled for a faulty part to an auto dealership or garage: The problem must be logged, the part ordered or taken from inventory, the car repaired, the franchise notified, etc.

2. Defusing Common Misconceptions about Open Source

Over the last decade or so, many misconceptions about open source have cropped up from proponents of proprietary software who feel threatened by open source. These misconceptions are intended to create fear, uncertainty, and doubt in would-be users and often turn them away from open source in favor of proprietary alternatives. Some specific criticisms of open source are in the following areas:

- Real-world use
- Customer support and consulting services
- Security
- Real-World Use

The GNU Project and similar concepts were the pioneers of the most recent open source movement by creating a new free operating system (resembling the proprietary Unix of the time but designed for the x86 processor architecture) that enabled end users to develop using completely open source software and learn from code that others had written. Since that time, open source has proven itself in real-world environments many times over.

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Consider the many technologies that use open source components today. Most notably, a great portion of internet servers run the open source LAMP stack. The LAMP stack consists of several core components made up of open source software: the GNU/Linux operating system, the Apache web server, the MySQL database, and interpreters for the PHP and Perl languages. Many common content management systems like Drupal and blogging software like WordPress are available under various open source licenses, along with popular software integrated development environments like Eclipse and NetBeans. Furthermore, the extremely popular open source Mozilla Firefox and Google Chrome web browsers have achieved an impressive 78.6% market share as of January 2013², and 54% of servers were found to run Apache³ in March 2013.

² Source: http://www.w3schools.com/browsers/browsers_stats.asp

³ Source: <http://news.netcraft.com/archives/category/web-server-survey/>

Aside from all of this, one needs to look no further for real-world use and real-world success than what hundreds of thousands of customers are seeking every day in terms of product, services, and support from major vendors regarding open source products:

- Operating System: Red Hat Enterprise Linux (RHEL), Oracle Unbreakable Linux
- Application Servers: Red Hat JBoss, Tomcat is supported by VMware and IBM
- RDBMS: Oracle owns and supports MySQL, PostgreSQL by VMware
- Data integration: Talend
- CRM: SugarCRM
- ERP: OpenBravo
- Business intelligence: Jaspersoft
- Web Content Management System: Drupal is supported by Acquia

2.1. Customer Support and Consulting Services

Naysayers often claim that open source software lacks adequate support infrastructure, and that just because a technology is widely used does not necessarily mean that it is supported by a commercial entity. In truth, larger open source projects are often backed or sponsored by large organizations and commercial entities. While the online forums for the most widely used open products are typically quite responsive, enterprise customers demand guaranteed service level agreements (SLA) from a vendor. Today, many prominent software vendors offer enterprise-grade support SLAs and consulting services for the leading open source products including those in the previous section.

2.2. Security

Proprietary vendors often claim that open source software is inherently insecure and inadequately supported for a real-world enterprise deployment scenario. In truth, one of the main advantages of open source software is the fact that it is highly scrutinized by a diverse audience; most vulnerabilities are discovered and patched relatively quickly before they can become major problems. In proprietary solutions, old bugs may persist over several releases and users must rely exclusively on the vendor for all patches.

The open source model lends itself well to debugging purposes because it is relatively simple for sufficiently skilled individuals to uncover problems and file bug reports with vendors. Some users may even create a fix themselves and then share it with others (third-party patches are often later incorporated into the main product).

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Proponents of traditional, proprietary, closed-source software claim that hiding the source code ensures the security of the application, but the “security-through-obscurity” concept is inherently

flawed since malicious users can still exploit bugs in a closed-source program or its dependencies even without access to the source code.

3. Open Source BPM vs. Proprietary BPM

The following factors should be considered specifically in relation to choosing between open source and proprietary BPM products:

- Target audience
- Transparency
- Freedom of choice with product upgrades and consulting services
- Cost-effectiveness
- Connector library and ecosystem
- Community vibrancy
- Open standards implementation
- Innovation for disseminating BPM

3.1. Target Audience

One of the most important factors in choosing a BPM solution is the target audience. Proprietary solutions have typically been tailored towards either the business audience or the technical implementers with very little overlap. Historically speaking, open source solutions tend to offer flexible solutions for technical audiences with a bottom-up approach where developers use BPM to streamline workflow and interact with data sources using a wide variety of connectors provided by the greater user community. Ideally, the BPM suite should fully serve both the business and technical audiences and bridge the communication, collaboration, and implementation gap between both audiences.

3.2. Transparency

Perhaps one of the most obvious benefits of open source products is the transparency of the product's code. Customers and community members can scrutinize the code, ensuring continued improvements in security, elegance, and performance. This in turn also provides greater liberties described in the following section.

3.3. Freedom of Choice with Product Upgrades and Consulting Services

An unfortunate and common path for proprietary vendors is to use the intellectual property of the source code as leverage against its customers. This is done in two ways: first with the software upgrade path and second with implementation projects in terms of consulting services. For the first way, in order to add features or augment the capabilities of the core product, proprietary vendors

typically require customers to either purchase the upgraded product edition that includes the desired features or else pay the vendor for the API use and/or to extend the product feature in an expensive services engagement.

With open source software, customers are free to extend the product according to their own requirements with or without the vendor’s participation. For the second way, the proprietary vendor’s close grip on the source code and APIs pressure the customer to purchase expensive services from the vendor or its partners. With open source software, customers can choose to implement the solution themselves or via system integrators that are perhaps not even directly affiliated with the vendor as an official partner.

3.4. Cost-Effectiveness

It is possible to get started with open source for very little upfront investment

Cost-effectiveness also plays a major role in BPM solutions. As previously stated, proprietary solutions are quite rigid in their approach and are not nearly as cost-effective in small, experimental applications due to cost and inflexibility as deployment expands. On the other hand, it is possible to get started with open source for very little upfront investment. Also, you have the option of testing open source in a small, non-critical area before rolling out a larger deployment for your core infrastructure.

3.5. Connector Library and Ecosystem

A large library of connectors is also essential for the long-term viability of a BPM solution. These connectors are used to inter-operate with third party systems (e-mail, applications, LDAP, social networks, databases, content management systems, etc.) inside a BPM workflow. Proprietary vendors often introduce “paywalls” and other obstacles into the process of creating third-party connectors because the vendor wishes to maximize profits. This partially suppresses the developer community and therefore limits the range of the proprietary application's capabilities.

In contrast, open source BPM vendors supplement offerings with the contributions of its user base and the larger community to improve the versatility of the product. Open source BPM products like the BonitaSoft suite already have a large library of more than 150 “out-of-the-box” connectors to choose from; this selection is augmented further by the user community's contributions. Quite often, a user may need to interact with a data source for which no connector currently exists. Rather than petition the software vendor to create a connector for that data source in a future release, the user has the option to create a connector and share it with others.

The contributions of [an open source] user base and the larger community...improve the versatility of the product

3.6. Community Vibrancy

The open source nature of a product also tends to encourage community participation far beyond what proprietary solutions can attract. In addition to official support channels, the community often creates third-party message boards or forums, blogs, and other resources that provide support for common problems. While proprietary applications may have a support community as well, it is seldom as comprehensive as what open source has to offer and may come with additional costs.

Another benefit unique to open source is the support for little-used niche requirements (also known as “long tail needs”) that many proprietary solutions may overlook or deliberately ignore due to an insufficient cost-to-profit ratio. The open source model allows the community to pick up the slack and provide the missing support to those who need it. For example, the community frequently delivers connectors for particularly obscure requirements that a vendor might not have the resources to immediately serve.

Open source often offers superior language support. In today's global economy, language plays a major role in the success of an application since the lack of a native translation in any given language would require a bilingual user to compensate. Rather than incur the extra trouble and expense, users are more likely to choose a competing product that includes built-in support for the language(s) they need. As of today, users in different countries have translated BonitaSoft into twenty languages. In contrast, proprietary BPM applications tend to be available in fewer language translations since vendors prefer to concentrate limited development resources on the largest market demographics.

3.7. Open Standards Implementation

A viable BPM solution should emphasize strong adherence to common open standards since this promotes far greater transparency than any proprietary format is capable of achieving. Proprietary tools are often deliberately incompatible with other formats, and some even go so far as to artificially tie the BPM client to a particular system or service provider. If a proprietary tool claims to adhere to open standards, great care should be taken to ensure that its interpretation of a standard is complete and accurate.

strong adherence to common open standards...promotes far greater transparency

On the other hand, tools like the BonitaSoft suite are able to interact with similar programs that faithfully adhere to the same open standards. For instance, BonitaSoft supports the BPMN 2.0 standard notation to express a business process in a way that is comprehensible to business and technical audiences

alike. BonitaSoft products interoperate with any document management system based on the Content Management Interoperability Services (CMIS) standard.

3.8. Innovation for Disseminating BPM

To stay true to its roots, open source solutions should offer innovation above and beyond what is found in proprietary offerings. Proprietary BPM offerings typically limit deployment options; users often have no way to manage and interact with processes except by a proprietary BPM portal.

Instead, BonitaSoft includes an easy-to-use web form editor for application developers. After easily connecting to third party systems and defining a custom look-and-feel for the application, developers can then generate applications based upon the process model. Open source BPM gives developers the means to deliver applications based directly upon the business process model, which empowers organizations to bring the benefits of business process management to anyone within the organization.

Conclusion

This white paper has detailed the clear advantages of open source BPM versus proprietary BPM products in terms of cost-effectiveness, flexibility, openness, and innovation. For tangible examples, visit www.bonitasoft.com to learn why major corporations like Konica-Minolta, DirecTV, Société Générale, and Trane use Bonitasoft's open source BPM to automate and improve their processes in a cost-effective way. With more than 1 million downloads, hundreds of customers, and thousands of community members, BonitaSoft is the fastest growing BPM vendor in the world and was recognized by Gartner in their *Cool Vendor* report.

Download Bonitasoft's suite today at www.bonitasoft.com and experience the advantages of open source BPM for yourself.

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