

“We are where we are because of open source technology”

Though open source technology has become commonplace now, there are companies hesitant about adopting it. The open source journey of Medma Infomatix Pvt Ltd should be an inspiration to them. Though Medma chose open source technology to get out of a ‘mess’ created by proprietary technology, the former has become fundamental to the company’s business model now, proving to be a good source of revenue.

A recent report claims that open source technology is ‘eating’ the software world. The revelation was made in a survey conducted jointly by Black Duck Software along with North Bridge Venture Partners. With the growing adoption of Linux and open source technology, one cannot deny that it is becoming the norm today. Not just the companies based in Tier I cities, but the ones in Tier II and Tier III towns are also showing keen interest in open source technologies, in their bid to make it big in the software world. One such firm is Medma Infomatix Pvt Ltd, which is based in Lucknow.

Medma Infomatix Pvt Ltd provides custom IT solutions to SMBs across the globe. Its technology solutions are made using open source tools and technology. The company started its operations in 2005 with just six to seven people and, today, it has grown manifold. It now has three offices in Lucknow and one in Ahmedabad, with a total employee strength of over 85 people. The owners have also incorporated their wholly owned subsidiary in US, which will start operations by the end of this year.

Speaking about the technologies used by the company, Harsh Jaiswal, founder of Medma Infomatix Pvt Ltd, said, “We use a lot of open source technologies including PHP, Ruby on Rails, AIR, Magento, OpenERP, Android, MySQL, SQLite, etc. We have been using these technologies to provide content management systems, e-commerce websites, ERP/CRM solutions, document management, cloud applications, mobile games/apps, Facebook applications, et al.”

Harsh Jaiswal, founder of Medma Infomatix Pvt Ltd



Open source: The way to go

Choosing open source technology over proprietary solutions was a decision that was made on the basis of the experiences of Jaiswal and his team. He recalls his first experience with open source technology, “Actually, we started with Debian in 2008 after a virus attack that infected almost all the PCs, even caused a network failure and failed FTP connections to client’s websites. Since we were running on proprietary operating systems, these virus attacks were quite common and we faced frequent downtime and, hence, were losing a lot of money in maintaining our infrastructure. But once we started using Linux as our OS, all problems relating to virus infections and security vanished. That was a turning point for us.”

“We now do not look at proprietary alternatives because open source is affordable, scalable, secure and robust. We are where we are because of open source technology,” adds Jaiswal.

Jaiswal’s firm not only uses open source technology in building solutions but also recommends it to clients and counterparts. He says, “The beauty of using open source technology is that your data is not locked in and so you are free to try any other technology or tool if you want to. So, we have been updating our infrastructure regularly and have been embracing better tools/software to enhance our operations. Similarly, it is beneficial for our clients because they (we) can scale their solutions anytime.”

The journey was not as easy as it sounds now. Convincing clients about using ‘not so popular technologies’ was quite a task for Medma’s team. Jaiswal recalls the early days. “Initially, we had to educate clients about open source technologies and then convince them. There were times when we gave them free solutions to try out our open source options. But now the scene is quite different. Clients are very much aware of the benefits of using open source technologies and are demanding that their products/solutions be developed by using open source alternatives. Vendor lock-ins are not a worry any more. People want complete control over their solutions, and what better option than open source technology to solve this problem,” he says.

Using open source technology not only brings financial benefits but other advantages as well. Jaiswal explains, “Most of the time, open source technology is free to use so you can try it out without risking your money. But this is not the only benefit that one gets. I feel open source technology is much more secure, scalable, robust and along with wonderful technology, you get a community of other users who are there to help you out. This is not the case with proprietary solutions, where users are self-centred and it is difficult to find communities to help other users.”

Tips for open source tech businesses

- As there are many new technologies and options available now, they should start by focusing on any one particular technology. Also, before applying or using it for their clients, they must first use it themselves. This is what we have done and grown our business.
- Instead of selling or promoting open source technologies, businesses need to sell solutions which work for their clients. So, the focus should be on the solution rather than on the technology. The solution has to be developed after analysing their clients’ specific business requirements.

The open source technology business in Tier II cities

Choosing a Tier II city was a deliberate move from Medma’s side. Jaiswal says, “I wanted to do something in Lucknow as it’s my home town. At that time, there was no IT scene in Lucknow. There were only a handful of companies, who were engaged in catering to only small local clients. We wanted our company to cater to the overseas markets but Lucknow was not on the world IT map, so we had to educate our clients a lot.”

The decision came with its own challenges, the main one being scouting for talent. Lucknow doesn’t have a scarcity of talent but it definitely has a dearth of experienced open source professionals and there is a general lack of awareness about the latest technologies. Jaiswal says, “The scarcity of experienced resources in open source technology is one of the biggest challenges. As most of the educational institutes are still teaching proprietary technologies, it becomes difficult to find readily-employable resources in the market. Also, there are very few specialised training centres teaching students about these technologies, and if they are, then they are offering network and OS training, which are not required in the present scenario. We need to have centres that train youngsters in the technologies that are being used for developing modern day IT solutions.”

Since it does not get the desired talent, training the right kind of people on open source technologies is the solution Medma has resorted to. Jaiswal explains, “We hire talented freshers from colleges and institutes, and then train them on the required technologies. Most of the time whatever they have learned in their colleges is of no use to us, so we have to start from scratch and train them on different technologies as per our requirements. Since these local resources are keen to join companies in other metro cities, we offer them a handsome stipend to join us and get this training.” 

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