

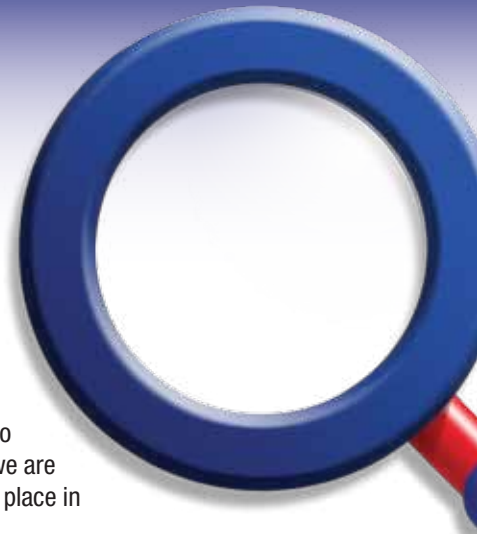
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Online newsletter available at
▶ <http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/newsletters/february2010.pdf>

This month we want to focus on accessibility. Did you know that in many countries, it is a legal requirement that ICT systems and software are accessible to people with disabilities? Open accessibility communities and projects are taking the lead in bringing open development practices to accessibility and creating tools of value for users. In our featured article Steve Lee fills us in on the key issues, techniques, technologies and communities that provide accessibility and Steve pops up again blogging about the release of the new [JISC TechDis toolbar](#). We believe that nothing is possible without community and so Sander van der Waal tells us about the power of community put into practice in his blog piece. As promised in last month's newsletter we are very pleased to announce that the OSS Watch conference will take place in Oxford on 24-26 June 2010. Watch our [RSS](#) feed for more details!

Elena Blanco, Content Editor, OSS Watch ▶ info@oss-watch.ac.uk



News from OSS Watch

Creating a project on SourceForge

In the early stages of an open source software project, there is much to do in order to lay strong foundations for the project. Some of the most important decisions relate to how that project will be managed, including where to host the version control system, how to set up the mailing lists, and so on. SourceForge is one of the best-known hosting sites for free and open source software development projects and Sander van der Waal helps us get started with creating a project on SourceForge.

▶ <http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/resources/sourceforge.xml>

Open Accessibility - an overview of projects and communities

In many countries, it is a legal requirement that ICT systems and software are accessible to people with disabilities. Ensuring accessibility requires an understanding of the issues as well as the use of appropriate techniques during design and development. Steve Lee introduces us to the key issues, techniques, technologies and communities that provide accessibility.

▶ <http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/resources/openaccessibility.xml>



Alfresco moves to LGPL

Alfresco has taken a step towards more permissive licensing by announcing that its repository will move to the LGPL (Lesser General Public License). John Newton, co-founder of the company, which recently celebrated its fifth birthday, said: 'What the LGPL provides over GPL is the ability to link in the Alfresco repository without affecting proprietary software that links it.'

▶ <http://newton.typepad.com/content/2010/01/a-shift-in-alfresco-community-license-to-lgpl.html>

European Commission approves Oracle's acquisition of Sun

The European Commission has approved the proposed acquisition of Sun Microsystems by Oracle. Its investigation, launched in September 2009, concluded that 'the transaction would not significantly impede effective competition'.

▶ <http://www.h-online.com/open/news/item/European-Commission-approves-Oracle-s-acquisition-of-Sun-909811.html> Firefox 3.6 release candidate available

Linux Foundation announces free training webinar series

The Linux Foundation has announced the launch of a series of free Linux training web seminars, also known as webinars, which will 'enable attendees to learn the fundamentals of Linux directly from the source of Linux, the developers themselves'.

▶ <http://www.h-online.com/open/news/item/Linux-Foundation-announces-free-training-webinar-series-913352.html>

Disney releases 3D modelling library under BSD licence

Disney Enterprises has released Ptex (Per-Face Texture Mapping), a system used to give texture and colour to 3D models in movies like 'Bolt', as open source. The code has been put up on GitHub under a BSD licence.

▶ <http://ostatic.com/blog/disney-releases-3d-modeling-library-under-bsd-license>

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Open Accessibility - an overview of projects and communities

In many countries, it is a legal requirement that ICT systems and software are accessible to people with disabilities. Ensuring accessibility requires an understanding of the issues as well as the use of appropriate techniques during design and development. This article introduces the key issues, techniques, technologies and communities that provide accessibility, allowing open source to reach as many users as possible.

1. Introduction to accessibility issues

Accessibility is about ensuring that software and content are available to people with disabilities. Such disabilities include restricted movement, blindness, deafness, learning difficulties and age related deteriorations like low vision or arthritis. Every one of these people has a unique combination of requirements or preferences when it comes to interacting with computer technology.

Accessibility is also about good universal design that ensures usability in a range of situations. For example access should not depend solely on screen display, mouse control and keyboard text input. Providing various alternative input and output modes can bring benefits in many situations. These include using small screens in mobile devices, or dealing with inhospitable working environments. Considering such issues during the design of a user interface (UI) will bring extra flexibility and customisation options. These may ultimately result in a design that is more attractive to the general population.

Currently, the common operating systems, Linux, Mac OS X and Windows, all provide accessibility features for end users. They also include facilities that program developers can utilise to make their programs accessible. So it is perfectly possible for people with disabilities to have an excellent user experience when using programs that run on these platforms. However, the reality often falls short of the ideal. This may be because developers are unaware of the requirements for good user interface, or how to apply appropriate design techniques. They might also not understand how to use the accessibility features provided by operating system.

Even when designers do understand the issues they may lack access to, or experience of, the wide range of the specialist software and hardware tools that provide enhanced accessibility. While specialist hardware input devices adaptations are commonly used, in many cases programs interact with them as if they were standard input devices. This allows a useful level of accessibility testing using a standard computer and appropriate

techniques. However, accessibility software is usually expensive, or must be obtained from specialist suppliers. Fortunately, the availability of open source accessibility software reduces the barriers to obtaining such software in order to test. For example, the open source NVDA screen reader is a free download and compares favourably with commercial offerings. Users can also freely evaluate open source software tools and projects offer excellent opportunities for them to make their requirements known. They can even contribute more directly to a project.

“ Sometimes developers overlook simple measures such as ensuring full keyboard access to a program or website. ”

Let's look at some of the projects and communities who are using open development techniques to create open source accessibility solutions.

2. Basic accessibility features

Most operating systems provide a desktop, a graphic environment that provides the primary interface with which users interact with the computer and its software applications. The desktop provides accessibility features that allow the user to customise their experience to suit their individual needs or preferences. Customisation options are numerous. They include using the numeric key pad to control the pointer; reversing the mouse buttons; producing an automatic click when dwelling over an item; using a high contrast colour scheme; or showing text with a large font.

Windows does not make a clear separation between the desktop and the rest of the operating system. In the Linux world, however, there are several desktop projects quite distinct from the core Linux kernel. Thus, on Linux, the available accessibility features will depend on which of several desktops is supplied. Alternatively, the user may have installed a desktop of their choosing. Mac OS X also has this clear separation, but only a single desktop is supplied. This means there is not the same variation in accessibility. The Solaris operating system provides the Linux GNOME Desktop by default.

Desktops also offer services that developers utilise in their programs in order to ensure maximum accessibility. For example the support for so-called 'mnemonic' key sequences, used for activating menus and buttons. In addition, there are accessibility features that are largely conventions or good practice, which developers should provide. Sometimes developers overlook simple measures such as ensuring full keyboard access to a program or website. Keeping an eye on those details is an important step in ensuring that the application is accessible to the maximum number of people.

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TechDis Accessibility Toolbar features open development

Published by Steve Lee on January 19, 2010

STAY UP-TO-DATE
 ▶ OSS Watch blog feed
<http://osswatch.jiscinvolve.org/feed>

The recent launch of the new [JISC TechDis toolbar](#) sees the introduction of an accessibility tool for students and others when accessing the web. This replacement for the previous TechDis toolbar increases the accessibility of almost any web site by running directly in popular web browsers, and provides features like text to speech of page content.

One important feature that may not be obvious from using the toolbar, is that the Accessibility Team at the University of Southampton [Learning Societies Labs](#), developed the toolbar for TechDis while also making it an [open source project](#).

By supporting this TechDis have increased the opportunity for sustainability by allowing the project to continue to evolve while attracting contributions from others, whether they are users submitting bugs and feature requests, or development teams interesting in using it in new applications. OSS Watch's advise on open development practices has enabled EA Draffan to include these in her management

of the project. In addition Seb Skuse, the lead developer, has used established open practices in his daily work on the project.

Seb attended one of the OSS Watch workshops on engaging with open source and found what he discovered useful in ensuring barriers to contribution are been minimised. The Accessibility Team have been heard to say that they enjoy working on an open source project and I am impressed with their eagerness to understand and apply the principles.

Working with them has been a very positive experience. They are undoubtedly a group to watch as they steadily increase their portfolio of open accessibility projects with wide application. Tools that demonstrate open innovation in provision for users of accessibility in education and beyond, by turning new ideas and research into solutions which provide practical benefits.

[Download and try the Toolbar](#) and let the team know what you think. You will find the team most welcoming of your [ideas or other contributions](#).

▶ Blog article continues at <http://osswatch.jiscinvolve.org/2010/01/19/techdis-accessibility-toolbar-features-open-development/>



The power of community put into practice

Published by Sander van der Waal on January 26, 2010 in development and community.

At OSS Watch, we actively promote that there is more to open source software than just a licence. Open source projects should use not just an OSI-approved licence but practice the [open development](#) method and if they want to become sustainable they should be [building a community](#) around their project. Once in a while, we come across a nice example of how the power of the community can be beneficial, and recently one of these examples occurred.

It started with an application that has been built by Nick Burch at the Apache Software Foundation to facilitate the search of [geographically 'nearby people'](#). He made this little Django application available via a Subversion repository with an Apache licence.

Linking people and projects is also one of the aims of the project registry framework [Simal](#) that OSS Watch is involved in. On Simal's public [demo site](#) there is a collection of projects and people working on these projects. Besides doing development work on the Simal application OSS Watch is starting to use the registry more often in our daily work. Unfortunately, we recently failed to find out about a project that was run at our institution, Oxford University, even though it was present in our public registry.

When I realised Simal was lacking functionality that had been useful for OSS Watch, i.e. to find nearby

projects based on location, I created [issue 263](#) for Simal, dumping my thoughts about possible solutions, among which the ASF application on nearby people.

A key problem in adding this functionality was to have the geo-location data of the institutions that are in involved in the projects. This prompted Ross to [reach out](#) to his wider community to see whether anyone had tackled this issue.

“There is just so much that we all collectively know and by having your project run out in the open, freely accessible by everyone, enables you to tap into the collective knowledge of many experts.”

The first and very useful [suggestion](#) on this matter was from Paul Stainthorp who pointed to a [list](#) of UK universities and their geo-location, which is maintained at Wolverhampton university.

The second one was from [Sam Easterby-Smith](#) who pointed to a list on Wikipedia. That was a good one, as [Wikipedia](#) is quite complete and geo-tagged, so we would have the data from that source if only we

had a convenient way of extracting it.

The solution to that problem is to use DBpedia and it was suggested both by James, who added a [comment](#) to the issue in the tracker, and by Wilbert Kraan on [Twitter](#). [DBpedia](#) is a community effort to extract structured information from Wikipedia and it provides a [public SPARQL endpoint](#) for querying Wikipedia data. We can conveniently query that endpoint for a list of the geo locations of all UK universities and add that data to our Simal repository.

So within one working day we have a solution to the main problem, getting the geo-location data. But Ross's discussion with someone already doing this revealed that they are manually creating the data, so they can potentially benefit from our search and automate it, if they want to. Furthermore, someone on Twitter noticed our search and he indicated that he would be interested in the solution, so potentially more people and/or projects can benefit. Furthermore, since everything happened completely in the open, even more people have the opportunity to find our solution and use it in their own problem space.

To me, this is a perfect illustration of the power of community. There is just so much that we all collectively know and by having your project run out in the open, freely accessible by everyone, enables you to tap into the collective knowledge of many experts. If this is not a reason to use the open development method, I don't know what is.

Events



Feb
22-26

GNOME 3 Usability Hackfest, London, 22-26 Feb 2010

The GNOME Usability team will be holding a GNOME 3 Usability Hackfest on 22-26 February 2010 at the Canonical Offices in London. The event will be an opportunity for the GNOME Usability team to focus, set goals, and accomplish work to prepare the GNOME community for the GNOME 3.0 transition and the future.

► <http://live.gnome.org/UsabilityProject/London2010>

Feb
24-27

JISC Developer Days, London, 24-27 February 2010

Dev8D is funded by JISC as part of the Developer Community Supporting Innovation project (DevCSI for short). Dev8D is 4 days of 100% pure software developer heaven with elements of an unconference within a conference. It will take place at the University of London Union, Malet Street, Bloomsbury, London, WC1E 7HY Wed 24 - Sat 27 February 2010.

► <http://moodle moot.org/>

Mar
10-11

Collaborations Workshop 2010, 10-11 March 2010, Edinburgh

The Collaborations Workshop is organised by OMII-UK and aims to generate successful collaborative e-Research partnerships. This year's workshop will take place on 10-11 March 2010 at the e-Science Institute, 15 South College Street, Edinburgh. The focus of the Collaborations Workshop 2010 is e-Research: the harnessing of computer technology for research. Registration is now open.

► <http://www.omii.ac.uk/wiki/CW10>

Mar
23-25

UKUUG Spring 2010 Conference, Manchester, 23-25 March 2010

UKUUG's annual Large Installation Systems Administration (LISA) conference and tutorials will be held in Manchester on 23-25 March 2010 at the Manchester Conference Centre. The call for papers is now open and submissions are invited for tutorials and conference talks.

► <http://www.ukuug.org/events/spring2010/>

Apr
14-16

Linux Foundation Collaboration Summit, San Francisco, California, 14-16 April 2010

The Linux Foundation's 4th Annual Linux Foundation Collaboration Summit is taking place in San Francisco, California on 14-16 April 2010. This event is for key stakeholders spanning the developer, end user and vendor communities to come together to collaborate and advance the Linux platform. Registration is now open.

► <http://events.linuxfoundation.org/events/collaboration-summit/cfp>

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q Isn't my project too niche to be a successful open source project?

A No project is too niche to be successful open source. The benefits of open source are great, even if the development community is small.

Unless you are the only potential developer on the project there are benefits to open sourcing. Even a single contribution adds value. Furthermore, are you completely sure that an adapted version of your code couldn't be of use to someone?

Q Could you add this call for papers/conference notification to your website and RSS feeds?

A We'd be delighted to, provided it is of interest to people in further and higher education in the UK and relevant to open source. Simply drop us an email at info@oss-watch.ac.uk.

For more answers to your questions visit: <http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/about/faq.xml>

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