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Active Blog
Open Source

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eHarmony and open source software make a good match

by Tina Gasperson – newsforge.com

eHarmony.com chooses open source software for its quality, not for its price, says Mark Douglas, vice president of engineering and operations for the popular online dating site.

eHarmony.com, with more than 11 million registered users, is expecting an influx of even more new registrations since it launched a site for [married couples](#) who want to improve their relationships. With all those paying customers, eHarmony can't afford to have server outages. "Down time on our site costs over \$1,000 per minute," says Douglas. So when it comes to selecting the best network monitoring and Web development apps, "we're not driven by saving money, we're driven by the best product."

For example, eHarmony uses [Hyperic's HQ](#) server management product to keep tabs on 140 servers in its data center. HQ is a collection of tools that has always included some open source pieces, like the plugin development kit that make Hyperic usable with almost any server statistics management application. Hyperic recently announced it is releasing the entire product group under the GPL. "We're really happy with it," Douglas says. "It works well and supports everything we have, even the esoteric stuff." He says Hyperic compares to commercial products, but the proprietary stuff "doesn't have the same kind of tech support."

eHarmony's Web sites run on open source Tomcat, JBoss, and Apache. "It's most of the stuff everyone is using," Douglas says. "Open source is not new to our company. We use it extensively, because the best product is often open source. We're not zealots about open source, we just go out and look for what's best."

To keep its sites running smoothly and with a minimum of down time, eHarmony updates them a couple of times a week. "There are new builds twice a week," Douglas says. "Maintaining the sites drives our day, because 100% of our revenue comes off those Web sites, and something's generally going wrong somewhere." Hyperic's server logs send alerts to Douglas and his staff when there's a problem that needs attention.

"We're kind of like a football team," he says. "When we get an alert, it goes to the entire team and everyone chases down the problem. In our environment, every possible problem you can find, we find." Because of that, he prefers open source software when it comes to bug-fixing.

"When you deal with commercial support, the support team doesn't want to believe you," he says. "It takes a while to get issues resolved. You'd think it would be quick because you're paying them."

With open source, fixes are readily available. "There's not a hidden bug list," Douglas says. "When there's a problem we can generally find out how someone else got around it. Occasionally, we'll pull up the source code ourselves. It's all about speed, because with down time our revenue doesn't come back. When people use the site for the first time, they're kind of

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hesitant. If they have any reason to change their mind, they will. With open source, any information we need, any assistance we need, we can find."

For IT directors who may be considering switching to open source software, Douglas has this advice: "Just pick the right product. Usually the concern about open source that I've witnessed is, 'how am I gonna get support?' But even if you're not paying for support there's a ton of information out there. I would just find the best product for whatever I'm trying to do, and if that's open source, there's generally a company that will help you."

For some products, open source provides "the only real feasible technology. Like [Filezilla](#)," Douglas says. "With that, there are features that are hard to find in anything else."

On the other hand, "We have a lot of applications where open source is not the right choice. We use Oracle as a database. That's about as expensive as you can get.

"We don't make that big a distinction between open source and commercial. This is what we use because it's good software."

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