

Free software helps Indian techies in many projects

Free software and open source tools are helping a range of Indian entrepreneurs to build software solutions that enhance the potential of computing for millions.

With names like Hindawi, Zmanda and Dhvani or KDE Hindi, these products are helping an entire new generation of software developres.

Hindawi (hindawi.in) is a suite of open source programming languages. It allows people to write computer programmes in languages other than English.

The Zmanda Recovery Manager (zmanda.com) is a perl-based utility used to automate backup and recovery of MySQL databases. Prominent on its management team are Indian names like Chander Kant, Paddy Sreenivasa, Ram 'TK' Krishnamurthy, and K.K. George.

Dhvani (dhvani.sourceforge.net) is a text-to-speech Indian-language initiative. It allows a Simputer to read what the user types. It was built to ensure that literacy and English skills were not essential to use the Simputer.

Using images in conjunction with voice output in local languages makes a computing device accessible to a larger section of the Indian population. Other winners are Fedora Spins, and KDE Hindi of indlinux.org.

MayaVi (mayavi.sourceforge.net) is an open source tool that allows easy and interactive three-dimensional visualisation of data.

In 2000, Prabhu Ramachandran, then a IIT Madras aerospace engineering student, started work on the MayaVi project with his colleagues to visualise computational fluid dynamics data.

'Popular tools available for the purpose at that time were proprietary and prohibitively expensive,' noted the Linux For You magazine, published from Delhi, which has announced its FOSS (Free and Open Source Software) India Awards for those involved in a 'saga of innovation'.

Peter Thomas of Satyam here worked on JTrac (jtrac.info), a FOSS 'issue-tracking web application'. That is a computer software package which manages and maintains lists of issues, as needed by an organisation. It is used to create, update and resolve reported customer issues.

Abhas Abhinav's DeepRoot Linux team here has developed deepOfix (deeproot.in/deepofix), which 'gives many proprietary mail servers a run for their money', commented Linux For You.

Another of the Indian winners was TuxType - into which five students of the Government Engineering College at Thrissur built Unicode Malayalam support.

This made TuxType (tuxtype.sourceforge.net) the first FOSS typing tutor to bundle Unicode support for Indian languages, at a time when Indian language solutions in computing is eagerly awaited, so that the potential across the country can be better tapped.

WANem (wanem.sourceforge.net) is a wide area network (WAN) emulator, coming from the Tata

Consultancy Services. It was built to provide team-members WAN access. Other WAN emulators were hardware-based, expensive and available to only a select few in test labs.

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