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Thoughts on "Free" Software

 UniPress Software

Supported Software Products

Software is bought because users realize that support and maintenance costs are higher than the purchase price. Since even "free" software must be supported and maintained, the costs of such "free" programs on large, evolving systems may be quite high.

Free software doesn't come cheap

A tremendous wealth of free software is available for the taking; "free" simply means that users need not pay for the privilege of using or copying it. Some free software has restrictions imposed by the author to prevent it from being sold, while other programs are in the public domain, meaning that anyone may do anything they wish with them.

Nearly all free software is unsupported. To users, that translates into fixing their own problems or finding someone who can. Unsupported software *may* suit your needs, depending on several things: level of expertise, amount of time available to devote to software maintenance and, of course, the software itself and what's it's being used for. But given the time and personnel constraints most people and organizations face, it is wise to consider the real costs of "free" software.

Free software's hidden costs

To the casual observer, it might seem that software products comprise little more than a tape and a manual or two. So, the observer might ask, why would anyone pay \$395 for a tape and a manual, when a comparable product can be had for practically nothing?

The answer is that free software carries many hidden costs. Free software isn't professionally supported, and its weed-like growth pattern ins an amalgamation of user-contributed hacks. There is also no central support organization to maintain orderly growth or development.

On the other hand, when you buy UniPress Emacs*, you get a lot more than a tape and a manual. You receive the technical support, product security, technical expertise and administrative service that only a professional organi-

zation can offer. You also get the superior Emacs, which UniPress' development organization has been refining for years.

Another hidden cost of free software is that of a maintenance programmer. Free software may originally cost nothing, but requires substantial programming time to maintain it. That programmer's time is devoted to finding fixes on various networks; downloading, installing and optimizing them; and beseeching, over the nets, members of the user community for assistance when technical questions/problems arise. Most importantly, programmers maintaining "free" software aren't doing what they're supposed to be doing: working on the organization's *real* projects.

UniPress Emacs carries a relatively tiny price tag; a \$10,000 UniPress Emacs site license is still far cheaper than even part-time efforts of the programmer who maintains the "free" version. UniPress also officially issues at least one significant update per year, which is backward compatible with previous releases.

Technical support and product quality

- Technical support: UniPress Software provides Maintenance customers with a toll-free 800 number for timely, technically correct support. Calls are received 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. EST, Monday through Friday. Most questions can be answered immediately over the telephone, but UniPress' support staff also calls on the technical staff for help with particularly difficult questions. Or if the user prefers, technical support is available via uucp e-mail, telex and write-in.

Users of "free" software do not enjoy the

* \$395 binary (workstations) and \$100 for one-year maintenance contract; \$995 for most source versions and 25% thereof for one year of maintenance.

benefits of telephone, telex or written product support. Technical questions must be posted to public networks, and users must wait for someone to come to their aid. This arrangement has several drawbacks: the end-user is ultimately responsible for finding his/her own solution, and is at the mercy of the user community for the timeliness and accuracy of the solution. Suggested solutions may not even work properly due to dissimilarities in the versions involved.

- **Product quality:** UniPress Emacs is a vital, continually-developed program; two to five programmers work full time to improve Emacs and ensure its portability. Emacs is particularly well-developed for such popular platforms as Sun, VAX, Apollo, Hewlett Packard and Silicon Graphics.

UniPress Emacs is also the foundation of two other successful products: vi-PLUS and C-macs; both are specialized editors built on top of the Emacs core, further attesting to UniPress Emacs' soundness and reliability.

UniPress actively solicits comments, suggestions and specific technical input from users, and incorporates their good ideas into regularly-released new versions. All updates are official releases and are sanctioned by UniPress, so there's no chance that a dozen different versions of a "standard" editor will be floating around an organization.

A business note

Unipress gladly negotiates with OEMs to set up partnership agreements, buy-outs and royalty schedules. We have many such relationships in place. (Pyramid, Convex and Silicon Graphics offer Unipress Emacs directly with the hardware, for example.) Hardware and software OEMs who use free software to create a product confront much difficulty in arranging secure distribution rights.

Technical superiority

- **Runs everywhere:** UniPress Emacs is extremely popular at sites using computers from different vendors and running under different operating systems; UniPress Emacs runs under a wide range of operating systems (all versions and derivatives of BSD and System V UNIX, Ultrix, VMS, Versa-DOS and MS-DOS) and looks the

same on all of them.

- **Major modes:** UniPress Emacs has many major modes of editor behavior, including C, Ada, text, MLisp, Pascal and EDT (for users familiar with this popular DEC editor). Users can even write their own major modes, creating an editor with the power of UniPress Emacs and a custom front end. All of UniPress Emacs' major modes are context sensitive; meaning they behave properly whether you're writing comment or code. In C mode, for example, ESC-J will work correctly on either code or comments; in justifying a comment, the prefix string (/ * in C comments, for example), is maintained and the comment is aligned under the comment's start.

- **Shell (listener) windows:** Shell windows pop up to allow the user to communicate directly with the UNIX System, and output from shell windows can be directed to another UniPress Emacs window. A UniPress Emacs' shell window behaves like a terminal, but allows the user to recall previously typed commands.

- **Typeout windows:** UniPress Emacs' typeout windows display transient information, such as help requested from the on line database. When you're done looking at a typeout window's information you can easily make it disappear by hitting DEL. An option variable may be set to either "simple" or "fancy" mode, the latter permitting scrolling, searching, saving and zooming within the typeout window.

- **Window management:** UniPress Emacs runs under many windowing systems, as well as on character terminals. It gives you a great deal of window management control—you control where the windows are to be placed on the screen, how big to make them, and how hard they will be to delete or otherwise usurped. You may even save and restore window configurations, which is particularly useful if you wish to use UniPress Emacs as your all-day, every-day working environment.

- **Automatic installation:** UniPress Emacs has an automatic installation program that greatly simplifies the installation process. It asks you questions about terminal drivers, resident directories, etc., and then examines the system to discover what kind of machine it is, whether

certain system libraries are present, and the type of window system supported. After all the questions are resolved, the install program automatically configures and installs Emacs accordingly.

Help and documentation

- On-line tutorial: First-time users will especially benefit from UniPress Emacs' on-line tutorial, which teaches basic Emacs navigation commands.
- Documentation: UniPress Emacs comes with over 800 pages of professionally developed documentation, which includes both a User Guide and Reference Manual. Additionally, our MLisp extension language is very well documented.

Code maintainability

- Better organization and structure: The controlled development of UniPress Emacs, as opposed to free software's "community effort" approach, results in source code that is much more logically structured and organized. In a word, cleaner.
- Extensively commented: UniPress Emacs' code is extensively commented, making it easy to modify.
- Lint: UniPress Emacs' code goes through lint with no problems — this cannot be said about other, similar programs.

UniPress Software

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