OSAF

OPEN SOURCE APPLICATIONS FOUNDATION

OSAF History

OSAF – How we started

OSAF started in 2001 when Mitchell Kapor began to investigate the possibility of developing a modern Personal Information Manager using open source tools and methods.

Decades of design

One of Mitch's passions has been designing software applications that people can use in everyday life -- tools that enhance the organization and retrieval of important information. Beginning almost two decades ago, he was instrumental in the design of a variety of landmark personal and business productivity tools including the first programmable spreadsheet (Lotus 1-2-3), a new kind of database optimized for entering small items of information in a free-form manner and adding organizational categories on-the-fly (Lotus Agenda), and a blindingly fast retrieval tool that indexed everything on the hard drive (On Location).

Through his several decades of work as entrepreneur, CEO, angel investor, and venture capitalist, Mitch retained his passion for making useful software, and accumulated a major backlog of innovative ideas for new software products.

But the development and adoption of innovative solutions in important areas of software has become quite difficult. One such area is that of desktop productivity applications, an area which encompasses a number of Mitch's most interesting ideas. Development costs are high, distribution channels are limited, and barriers to entry are significant. The chance is small that the traditional venture-capital-backed model of software development will fill this need.

The right time for an alternative software development model

The Linux operating system has demonstrated that freely shared, collaboratively developed system software can gain critical mass and become a viable, even preferred, alternative to traditional proprietary

software. The opportunity exists for the same thing to happen in the applications space, and OSAF was created to pursue this vision. Mitch found the idea of making something which would be freely shared and improved upon extremely compelling. The right product, developed in this way could have a chance to make a significant impact in the world.

In the spring of 2001, Mitch initiated a limited experiment by hiring a consulting group to prototype a couple of the key ideas. The results were both exciting and encouraging, and so, in the summer of 2001, he took the plunge. He committed to open source and hired the first employee of a fledgling non-profit, the Open Source Applications Foundation, with the mission to create and gain wide adoption of open source application software of uncompromising quality. In February 2002, OSAF obtained Federal 501(c)3 nonprofit status.

Why a non-profit? Mitch, the successful entrepreneur and venture capitalist, had not all of a sudden ceased to believe in the virtues of capitalism. Rather, he wanted to make a clear statement: the intent of this effort was not to use this as a vehicle to make more money for himself. However, he would be very happy for others to make money and intended to find a licensing scheme which would permit both non-commercial and commercial development on the code base.

Today

By the end of the first quarter of 2003, OSAF had established a core team of sixteen who created the initial architecture, design, and core code for a 21st century personal information manager code-named Chandler. Chandler has attracted an interested and knowledgeable community of people which has made significant contributions to the project. The core team at OSAF will work with the open source community through the development and release of the product.