



Free Software at Rosenzweig and Maffia

Industry News (taxonomy/term/22)
by Ruben I Safrin on December 30, 2002

Here in New York City we've suffered from the quadruple whammy of economic trouble with the destruction of the financial district after the September 11th attack on the city, the dot-com meltdown, the stock market crash, and the assault on technical innovation by the media industry. Many of the local Free Software community have suffered badly, losing their homes, their businesses, and their self-esteem. As the President of the [New York Linux Scene \(NYLXS\)](http://www.nyfss.com), (<http://www.nyfss.com>) I've had to do quite a bit of hand-holding and support for members. While we've tried hard to move forward with many of the political issues which confront Free Software, the high unemployment in our community has pushed economic development to the top of the group's agenda.

In July, we started to take more concrete action in trying to do something to stimulate business for Free Software in the NYC community. We had already established a jobs posting site which has helped hook up employers with candidates. But this hasn't been enough. A committee has been formed in NYLXS to try to take on first hand the task of driving sales for Free Software. We've dubbed this effort, "The Free Software Chamber of Commerce". The result of our efforts is bearing fruit, and we hope to be an anchor and a safe haven for both well trained consultants and businesses looking for innovative solutions to their business problems.

NYLXS already had several support programs in place to help its business development plans. First, the organization has Software Institute (FSI), and general education and training program which had already been a huge success. With over 250 individuals trained through the FSI, many individuals were available for work with known business ready skills in Free Software. It had also been responsible for two large business expositions for Free Software with Laguardia College, CUNY in Queens, and at the City of New York Graduate Center in Midtown Manhattan. Both events where heavily attended and attracted businesses from around the New York Metropolitan area.

Joseph Maffia, a CPA and member of NYLXS' Free Software Chamber of Commerce, and partner in [Rosenzweig and Maffia LLP](http://www.rm-cpa.com) (<http://www.rm-cpa.com>) in midtown Manhattan, has joined the group because of the large amount of Free Software he has used in his firm. Most of his office's server infrastructure is based on GNU/Linux. They use SAMBA, Postgres, SQL-Ledger, PHP Groupware, PHP, Sendmail, OpenOffice.org, Apache, and Perl in their current business. They have also made extensive use of FreeSWAN VPN for remote connectivity. This has saved them thousands of dollars on their IT budget. And they are looking to now provide external office services for others.

While PHP Groupware has served them well in collaboration and calendaring, the program has been inadequate for their office management needs. Currently they depend on Practice Solutions for the office management needs. It includes important client contact capabilities which are more functional than the time tracker in PHP Groupware. While the company took a long look at Free Software solution for their client billing and contacts, the functionality in PHP Groupware and other solutions was just missing the ability to create invoices. PHP Groupware has also shown a fair number of bugs, especially in its Company Directory system and its client database system. It's also missing significant Human Resources functions such as the ability to track health insurance, pay scales, and personnel file.

On their accounting side, they've implemented SQL-Ledger, after a long search for viable accounting software. Their present accounting software includes a heady set of nearly functional programs that include Practice, Go Systems audit and ProTaxes, as well as the usual Intuit offerings. The group had searched for Free Software solutions and even looked at proprietary systems that run on GNU/Linux. In the tax preparation area, and the online IRS filing software, Free Software at this junction has no answers. Important bridges from accounting records to auditing to tax programs are not available. SQL-Ledger is still developing, but it is looking better and developing quickly.

Complicating things further is the fact that some accounting software uses Microsoft Office. This means that although they can easily use OpenOffice.org for general office use, they still need the proprietary office programs for the accounting package.

These Microsoft programs can be difficult in unexpected ways. While the FreeSWAN VPN has worked flawlessly, the workstation set up programs have put the executables on the file server. Inside the office, this works fine. But on DSL and VPN over the internet, connectivity is just too slow. It takes forever for applications to open over the Internet. And in this regard, AT&T's Virtual Network Computing has been a godsend. Implementing a combination of VNC and FreeSWAN has given a cost saving alternative to Citrix services.

Widows applications can also cause trouble with Samba. Opllock problems with poorly written MS Access based programs have caused corruption of files. W2000 workstations have been pressed into file sharing services for these applications.

Maffia tries to take all these things in stride. "We've tried to be at the cutting edge in the use of powerful technology for the benefits of our clients. For those who are in the Free Software business, they can be confident that we can do nearly all their accounting tools with genuine Free Software. But for the productivity of the Office, while the desktop itself is clearly ready for business use, the set of applications for accountants is lagging. We're hoping that with the Free Software Chamber of Commerce that we can help



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develop a new market for Free Software accounting products. SQL-Ledger looks like it is rapidly developing and is on track. And we will continue to work with the Free Software development community in bringing more and more solutions into production."

The Free Software Chamber of Commerce doesn't just have programmers and system administrators. It has accountants, lawyers, graphic artists, musicians, cluster experts, telecommunications experts and network experts. It works with anyone who is looking to see Free Software succeed in the business world. They have pooled their resources to develop a marketing strategy and promotional literature. Everyone has pitched in, and our literature is now being to be ramped up. NYLXS invested in folders for the group. Literature and product development is also underway. Presentations have already been created with OpenOffice.org, corporate training is being worked out, and sales staff is being hired.

Our emphasis is going to be the client. The purpose of this support network is to provide clients with a user friendly interface to the best tech minds in NYC. Paul Rodriguez has been hired for our client relations department. Paul is very good with people. He's a real people person and a hard worker. When you hire one person in the network, you hire the whole team. This gives us the ability to give top notch 24/7 support to even the smallest businesses at great pricing. And it also gives us the ability to service professionally the largest of corporations in NYC.

The Free Software Chamber of Commerce product line is integrating Bayonne Services into these products, combining telephone services into the computing infrastructure. We can provide the wiring and end to end support. We are out to show that Free Software, through collaboration, is more capable of providing products and services than anything else on the market.

One of the advantages that NYLXS has is that it already has an education and training program. This will allow us to guarantee students that come through the system will have job opportunities, and we will be certain about their skills before sending them out into the field. We believe that Free Software needs to do business differently. We plan to emphasize support and collaboration. We expect to work together to give levels of technical training and support that would not be available to consultants without collaboration.

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