

GLM's at a crossroad

Thoughts on the organization's strategy
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Introduction

GNU/Linux Matters is over 18 months of age as I write, and with eight languages and counting, we're starting to reach to a non-negligible number of Windows users every day. Still, we're facing a rather large problem in the coming three months, as we're lacking the means, human and financial, to keep growing comfortably. This short paper looks at the problem and makes a few bold proposals to deal with it.

A frank look

GNU/Linux Matters has 2 main strengths:

- We are truly multi-lingual. We can reach to a public [in Vietnamese](#), [Arabic](#) and more, in a durable way (all translations are maintainable).
- We have good quality material. I believe we really cover what matters to the greater public, not just computing enthusiasts.

And, we have 3 weaknesses:

- Our external income is still negligible. Internal contributions [still make up for 80% of our budget](#). It's way too much.
- We are too few. There are only two active developers, Gustavo and myself, in addition to the dozen translators.
- We still fail to attract companies. Only a very few small corporations back us. We're not relevant enough for larger players in the free software industry.

And now, the problem

Things are pretty simple: neither myself or Gustavo can afford to work for, and pay for, the organization for much longer. We need a way to sustain ourselves, all of us.

There is no reason to believe that things will improve by themselves. Consider this:

- We have a well-organized legal body with an “open” attitude
- We have been communicating extensively about our work [in many European conferences](#)
- I have been actively trying to obtain funding from many large players in the free software scene.

None of this has been enough. Clearly, in order to find more funds and afford not quitting the organization altogether, we have to change.

Proposals

There are two things we should work on, in my view.

A) Develop a commercial activity on our websites

We have started doing this to some extent with the [nonbreakingspace ad network](#). It is still partly experimental and I would like to develop its use further.

More importantly, I would love to see some additional, even more relevant commercial links on the GGL websites. It makes sense for our readers to purchase introductory books about GNU/Linux, and commercial links towards major bookstores are easy to set-up.

Similarly, downloading a 700MB iso file and burning it to a CD is a hassle for many beginners. Commercial links to CD vendors are as relevant to our readers as they are for us.

B) Make our work relevant to the larger players

This is, by far, a much harder task. The gist of this idea came as I made my way through the professional booths at a recent French free software event. “Selling” GLM's work and relevance, in order to obtain sponsorship, even with [good printed material](#) and wearing a tie, is very difficult.

In short, I would like to see GLM evolve from a “peculiar-small-non-profit” status, into a widely-recognized body, from which we can reach companies such as Canonical, Red Hat or other.

A few main ideas:

- **A new name for the organization** is almost a pre-requisite. “*GNU/Linux Matters*” is overloaded with meaning, difficult to pronounce and spell in every language. We need something short and that only works as a *name*, nothing more.
- Having **less “GNU/Linux” and more “Linux”** is important. Apart from the FSF, no body – neither our readers¹, nor our potential sponsors² – uses, or wishes to use, the cumbersome “GNU/Linux” term.
This change is not going to please the most fervent FSF members among ourselves, but, very simply, we need funds. The FSF isn't even looking at us.
- **A less negative attitude** on GGL would be a good thing. The bulk of the website is the “[Why not Windows](#)” section, which I fear is too detailed and too harsh to be effective. A much better alternative would be to turn these into positive aspects of free software.
- **A new domain name** for GGL would be most welcome. We've owned the domain [getlinuxnow.org](#) for a little while, now is a good time to use it.

1 Google hits for FR site, September: “Linux” outweighs “GNU/Linux” by roughly 60 to 1.

2 I have yet to see a single non-minor company publicly talk about “GNU/Linux”.

- **A less austere and informative look** would also be very productive. I am eying the [Firefox 3 web pages](#) look with envy; it's perhaps time to part with our “simple simple informative” visual appearance, and go for something a little more exciting for both our readers and our potential sponsors.

I have no single doubt that going through the above points will cause havoc in our community – perhaps something similar to the recent KDE troubles when jumping from 3 to 4. We cannot do everything perfectly, and certainly not anything that will suit everyone.

But I think those changes are very much unavoidable. Those who doubt this should look at our finances, activities, and the number of contributors. Feedback is welcome, and so, as always, is participation.

Thank you.

Olivier.