Project Cauã V0.5

Neither time nor politics can stay the progress of Project Cauã. *By Jon "maddog" Hall*

What would you do if you came up with an idea that could create more than 4 million new high-tech jobs, reduce the amount of electricity used by computers, make systems easier to use, reduce the amount of waste thrown into landfills, supply gratis wireless networking for people, and create a huge grid of free or "almost free" supercomputing for university and business projects needing huge amounts of CPU power, doing all of this with private sector money in a way that would pay for itself and be self-sustaining?

At this time of massive unemployment and governments straining to be solvent, would you keep this idea to yourself in hopes of making money, or would you give it away?

I have been working on Project Cauã [1] for more than five years. It began with reminiscing about the "good old days" when your local support team was within earshot and all you had to do was use the software that you worked with every day. You did not need to worry about backups, install software, or struggle with viruses (unless the person next to you was sneezing), because someone else was paid to do that.

I know many people who have stopped using Free Software and have gone to Windows or Apple citing that they want something that "just works," or "they do not have time to play around with Free Software to get it to work." Would they have stayed with Free Software if they had ready access to someone who would install their system, keep it up to date, and make sure they had plenty of disk space, processing power, and virus-free systems to keep them going? What if this person was so physically close that you could reach him or her in a couple of minutes on foot, so you could sit down with him, tell him your issue, and get an answer?

What if this person was their own boss and sold not only their consulting services to you but also sold you the computing power, the networking infrastructure, and provided the software necessary to run your home or business in a better way for less money than you were paying today? What if you never had to worry about your system breaking or becoming obsolete?

After working on this problem for three years by myself, a Brazilian friend and businessman, Douglas Conrad of OpenS Tecnologia, wrote to me and said he thought my plan would work and that we should refine it, write it up, and apply for a government grant to finance the development of the project. For two years we applied and re-applied for the grant, but each time we were told ,"it is interesting but …."

During this time, we refined the hardware, waiting for elements that were "almost there" to arrive. Items like USB 3.0, and very low power but effective CPUs and graphics chips. Douglas also used some of the prototype systems to build his own home entertainment system, which amazed his friends when they came to visit.

We used this time to enlist other partners. We formed a Board of Directors of business people with different expertise in training, web hosting, and consulting – all with Free Software. We made a liaison with the University of São Paulo, with the intent of having them design a unique thin client using open components with an open design and then licensing that design to companies that wanted to manufacture it inside of Brazil. We started to reach out to Spanish-speaking partners for moving the project from its pilot programs in Brazil to Spanish-speaking countries.

The change in government from President Lula to President Dilma Rousseff caused us to slow down our plans. Although we do not need a lot of government money to put the project in place and sustain it, we do need the government of each country to understand and approve what we are doing. Fortunately, President Rousseff maintained and strengthened a lot of the progressive programs that President Lula had started, and we now have contacts in her government and industry that are working with us.

Now we are moving forward, and although we are not going to be releasing Project Cauã as we first envisioned it, we will be releasing "Project Cauã V0.5," which will prove a lot of the concepts we originally defined in Project Cauã. We will be helping LPI-certified systems administrators start their own businesses to sell and support Project Cauã-based systems.

We invite the Free Software community to join with us and help us answer the question asked of me so long ago: "How can I make money with Free Software?" ∎∎∎

INFO

[1] Project Cauã homepage: *www.projectcaua.org*