

# Aim is national framework for open-source software

Stakeholders will formulate action plan at conference, writes David Jackson

DEVELOPING a national framework for the adoption of open-source software — an IT phenomenon that is dominating the corporate and government technology agenda both here and abroad — will be a focal point of a two-day conference beginning in Johannesburg today.

The Go Open Source Task Team Conference, being held at the Sandton Convention Centre, was organised by the Go Open Source campaign, a coalition between The Shuttleworth Foundation, Hewlett Packard (HP), Canonical and the Meraka Institute of the CSIR.

The conference will bring together key stakeholders in government, civil society, the corporate business world and the academic and educational community, among others. Industry players invited to attend include hardware suppliers, systems integrators and suppliers of open-source software.

The main objective is to

provide a platform for representatives to prepare an open-source software report that will seek to transform the government's policy agenda into an action plan for presentation at the Presidential International Advisory Commission next month.

The formation of a national task force on open-source software has been under discussion for the past 12 months. The conference is expected to take the process forward by defining the terms of reference and the composition of the new body.

Although no official policy or regulatory framework on open source is in place in this country, the Government Information Officers' Council has concluded that open-source software should be recognised in government policy, say industry sources.

The Go Open Source campaign's four coalition partners seek to create a greater awareness, understanding and adoption of open-source software in

the South African marketplace.

Hilton Theunissen, Cape-Town based project manager with The Shuttleworth Foundation, says that accelerating awareness of open-source software in SA has been an integral part of the foundation's mandate.

The foundation has undertaken, and funded, a number of projects — particularly in education — that it has identified as having the potential to make an impact on the adoption of open source, its use, and the creation of skills around it.

"Our founder, Mark Shuttleworth, is a real-life example of the opportunities that open-source technology can present. The company he built — and sold — was built on open-source software. He believed he needed to share that with SA's citizens and with government."

Lynette Chen, government and public affairs director for HP in SA, says that in this country and elsewhere in Africa open-

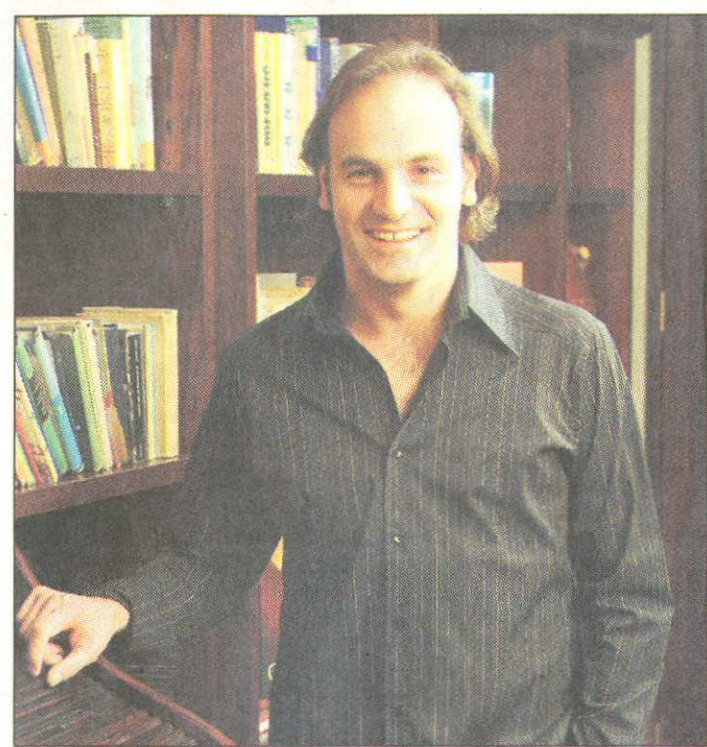
source technology is becoming increasingly applicable because of its affordability and flexibility.

One of open source's key benefits, for example, is that the source code can be changed or modified by anyone. Another advantage is that the software can be translated into different languages, which lowers the entry level for people in rural areas wishing to learn about information and communications technology (ICT) and to become computer literate.

Chen says that there is a growing interest, within government in particular, to go the open-source route.

"Government is one of our most important focus areas and we want HP to be positioned as a thought leader in Linux technology and the open-source arenas."

Originally created by Linus Torvalds, with the assistance of developers around the world, Linux — said to be the fastest-growing operating system in the



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world — is an open-source operating system that is freely available over the internet.

HP hopes that the conference will help to set moves in motion towards a national framework on open-source standards, policy, implementation, training and support, Chen says.

Issues that will be discussed at

various workshop sessions during the conference will focus on the potential impact and implications of open-source technology in SA.

Topics will include the economic impact, infrastructure and facility provision, the social impact, service delivery and policy formulation.