

Open source suits the African market exceptionally well: Q&A with Brendan Mcerlain

 By [Cari Van Wyk](#)

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Red Hat, a leading provider of open source solutions, recently visited South Africa to host the Red Hat Forum in Johannesburg. Attendees learned how to take full advantage of open source technology solutions.

"Open source - and its near relative, the cloud - is not just a technology option," says Werner Knoblich, SVP and GM Red Hat EMEA. "It's a holistic approach to business. It's not part of the big picture. It's what makes the big picture possible. That's why we expect it to have a significant impact on Africa's development."

We wanted to know more about the adoption of open source technology and how Africa is taking full advantage of it to drive growth. Brendan Mcerlain, director Marketing, Red Hat EMEA had the answers.

■ *Could you briefly define Open Source software for us?*

Brendan Mcerlain: Open source software is software that can be freely used, changed, and shared (in modified or unmodified form) by anyone. Open source software is made by many people and distributed under licenses.



Brendan Mcerlain

How has Africa taken advantage of Open Source software or in which ways have they started to use it to grow their information and communication technologies?

Mcerlain: Open source suits the African market exceptionally well because you can just access it and start using it. One of the big drivers of this is the growing, mobile-connected population. People have a thirst for knowledge and new technologies, and access to the internet presents new opportunities for learning and development.

What are the biggest challenges still facing Africa in the digital industry?

Mcerlain: The only thing holding people back are their own imaginations and the infrastructure available to them to access the internet. Training is available online 24x7; thousands of communities, forums, blogs, etc. make it easy to share experiences and ideas.

■ *What are some of the major business benefits of Open Source Software?*

Mcerlain: Open source solutions used to be driven by initiatives such as cost savings and consolidation - now it is about being innovative and open source communities are driving that. Open source gives companies the ability to be more innovative by not having to re-invent the wheel each time they need to create and deploy an application; this in turn allows companies a much shorter time to market.

■ *What security risks are there to using Open Source Software?*

Mcerlain: At Red Hat we don't see any security related risks to adopting open source solutions - over 90% of the Fortune 500 companies already rely on Red Hat for their enterprise as do many leading organisations in South Africa and the African sub-continent. Red Hat has built an enviable reputation for helping customers manage risks and vulnerabilities before they become a problem - not many of the traditional proprietary vendors can respond as quick as we can never mind in advance. So whatever the entity - public or private sector - Red Hat can help institutions adopting open source solutions remain complaint and be in control of vulnerabilities often before they arise.

■ What impact does Open Source Software have on innovation and change in the IT services industry?

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A young developer today can be part of something global and play a leading role in new innovations that did not exist five or ten years ago. Being open is more than simply letting people see the code - it is a development process; it is about taking every line of your code and moving back into the community to be innovated on. Organisations, which embrace this and understand the value of being open, will benefit from the technological innovations and community-led development.

ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

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