

Startup Offers Free Version of Open-Source, On-Demand BI Software

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A small startup, Adaptive Planning, has taken the next step in offering alternative application technology by combining on demand and open source to build business intelligence-based performance management software. The question is, now that the company has built it, will users come?

The goal for Adaptive Planning is to "dramatically expand" its base of users who will move forward from free, hosted versions of its software to paid subscriptions, according to William Soward, the company's president and CEO.

To do that, the company announced April 6 a free version of its namesake Express Edition On-Demand software.

The suite, available as a free download to companies with fewer than 50 employees, is designed to help users move budgeting, forecasting and reporting off of spreadsheets and onto a more automated solution, hosted by Adaptive Planning.

The thought - one that's tried and true in both the on-demand and open-source worlds - is that by getting users interested in free software first, they will eventually upgrade to a paid subscription.

"Today we have three versions - Express, Corporate and Enterprise," said Soward, in Mountain View, Calif.

"Corporate and Enterprise have more functionality, more services. So if someone downloads Express, after they've deployed that we think they will want to start doing more extensive financial reporting - analysis, workflow, adding users. To do that, they need to upgrade to subscription basis."

Soward said he is confident Adaptive Planning will win its fair share of customers, but the first step is to get them in the door.

So far, the company has amassed more than 70 paying customers, including some big names such as Triple A and NetSuite, itself an on-demand provider of ERP (enterprise resource planning) software.

On the open-source front, Adaptive Planning has had a fair amount of downloads - 38,000 in 71 countries - from SourceForge, an open-source community forum.

But its community, the folks who actually build open-source code around Adaptive Planning's software, is nascent at best.

"Our understanding is our community would come out of our partner channel, that would be sort of the first wave of this," said Soward. "That's started to happen."

The biggest number of postings on Adaptive Planning's community forum is indicative, perhaps, of the evolving open-source business applications model: There are 18 missives on post-installation run-time issues and a dozen on installation issues. The third runner-up, with 10 posts, is the area titled "Getting started with your model."

As for Adaptive Planning's open-source software downloads, Soward says the surprising thing is that he is seeing an increasing number of business users interested in the company's software, rather than the

traditional SourceForge audience of developers.

He attributes the shift to a growing acceptance of open-source software as a viable alternative, driven by the relative success of companies such as SugarCRM and Compiere, an open-source ERP and CRM (customer relationship management) provider that announced in March 1.2 million downloads of its software from SourceForge since the company's inception in 2001.

"There have been a lot of business users going to SourceForge and surviving to talk about it," said Soward.

"A meaningful number of participants have finance titles. We have a CFO - chief financial officer - in the Midwest using our software. That world is changing."

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