

## Open source software and ExtraGang

Open source software — sometimes called “free software” — are computer applications that have been developed (in most cases) by volunteers. Using Internet features such as mailing lists, forums, e-mail and instant messaging, a project team is not required to reside all in the same office, building, city or country.

Many pieces of software that are in use in thousands — even millions — of homes and businesses worldwide are created under the open source concept. The Linux operating system? Open source. The FireFox browser? Open source.

The leading web serving application, Apache, is also open source as is one the leading relational databases, MySQL. PHP, a development environment for Apache, is another open source application.

Aside from being developed and maintained by volunteers, what distinguishes open source software? First and foremost is that it is free. And while that frequently means “free” as in “free beer,” it also means “free” as in “freedom of speech” or “setting the animal free.”

The advantage here is that all the computer code is peer-reviewed for quality assurance. A for-profit company can probably only afford to have a handful of people testing out new code; an open source project has hundreds (if not thousands) of testers who report bugs and then test to make sure the bugs got fixed.

If you are in a club or a non-profit, you know exactly the stresses you go through relying upon volunteers. From that experience, you might be tempted to say, “I don’t want free software, I want professional software. That way I know it will be supported.”

The perspective of your club or non-profit isn’t really the case in the open source world: because the software is being worked on by hundreds or thousands of developers, it usually isn’t dependant upon one individual.

ExtraGang leverages a variety of open source components to build highly interactive and attractive web sites. Starting with Apache, MySQL and PHP, we use the content management system Joomla! as the basis for our sites. Joomla! code is mature, award-winning and is supported by an extraordinarily active community.

A site built in Joomla! is easily maintained by non-technical people. If you can use a word processor and a web browser, you can maintain and update your web site, without having to go through a “webmaster.” You become your own webmaster.

This means that the burden of maintaining your web site can be distributed among a large number of volunteers. If one person gets sick or quits, there are still many people who know how to change the home page. You aren’t stuck with a stale site because the volunteer who has done the web page can’t help.

Please contact us today so that we can assess your needs and give you an estimate.