A Wee Bit for a Wide World

You've probably heard something about open-source software – it is simply software for which the source code is open to anyone, and that is "free". The best example today is Linux, an operating system that is competing with Microsoft's Windows. The idea is that with access open to everyone, and with application and quality improvement contributions by anyone, the software will be trouble-free and highly productive.

In a different but parallel development in the late '80s, Tim Berners-Lee, a young computer engineer was working in a large international nuclear research lab (CERN), with many multinational teams. He grappled with the dilemma that while all were working towards the same goals, most used different computer systems which did not allow them to communicate or share information. In the course of solving the problem, Tim invented what we know today as the World Wide Web (WWW). Berners-Lee chose not to patent his Web software, fearing that if his software were proprietary it would foster the development of many competing "Webs" – and his vision of connecting everyone, everywhere, would go nowhere.

The application of the principles of open-source software has enabled Linux to make great gains, although the race with proprietary software (Windows) is far from over. The WWW has become an integral part of our everyday lives – enabling us to communicate and share information anywhere in the world. Today, Berners-Lee heads the WWW Consortium at MIT, working on new ways to expand and improve the Web. A modest and private man, he explains he only contributed a wee bit. The next time you use the WWW, you may gain further appreciation about how his wee bit contribution has enabled us to easily and rapidly access a very wide world.

Roger

PS For the whole story, you might enjoy: Weaving the Web, by T. Berners-Lee.

So You Think You Know Everything?

In the 16th Century:

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food, causing lead poisoning death. This happened most often with tomatoes, so for the next 400 years or so, tomatoes were considered poisonous.

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or "upper crust."

Because roofs were thatched there was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could mess up your bed. Hence, a bed with big posts and a sheet hung over the top afforded some protection. That's how canopy beds came into existence.

(to be continued . . .)