

## Brazil: Software Firms Join the Free Software Bandwagon

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The Brazilian government has won an unlikely ally in its campaign to spread the use of free software like Linux in Brazil: the Brazilian software industry, which decided to back the Federal Government as a way to get financing and other incentives to the struggling domestic software industry.

In exchange for their support, the Brazilian software companies are asking from the government some concessions, including changes in the way bidding for public contracts are done and the creation of a basic regulation for free and open source software.

They believe such an arrangement would guarantee financing for the domestic software projects as well as allow small and medium companies to bid in contracts offered by the public sector.

Another benefit from an alliance between the software industry and the government is the fact that products developed would be available for free to the whole Brazilian society, due to the nature itself of the product.

The Lula administration seems to agree with these claims. Sérgio Amadeu, president of the National Institute of Information Technology, a division of Brazil's Ministry of Science and Technology said, "The government has to use its buying power to stimulate the national software industry."

The federal government has already decided that the 2 million computers to be used in the federal "digital inclusion" initiative, to start in early 2005, will be equipped with open source software. The reasoning is that Brazil is a poor country and the little money there is should be used to train people and not to pay software fees.

The new program's intention is to bring broadband Internet around the nation even to the most remote regions of the country. Brazil has big ambitions, but very little money. The grandiose project has a Spartan budget of US\$ 1 billion.

Anatel's (National Agency of Telecommunications) president, Pedro Jaime Ziller insists that people have to be creative in order to implement the Internet project. "We have to find ways to reduce the costs of such a program," he says. "The money we have is barely enough for us to start. Without wise planning we will not be able to do anything."

Representatives of the software sector went earlier this week, to Brasília, Brazil's capital, for a meeting with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's Staff Chief, José Dirceu.

Márcio Girão, the president of the Society for the Promotion of the Brazilian Software's Excellence (Softex), talking on behalf of his colleagues, says that the free software is being seen by the Brazilian software industry as its only chance to compete with the big multinationals like Microsoft.

Fenainfo and Assespro, two other software associations are also supporting the idea of government patronage. Together with Softex they represent 90% of Brazil's software industry. Fenainfo is the National Federation of Information Companies and Assespro is the Association of Brazilian Companies of Software, Internet and Information Services.