Practical approaches and support

Open Sauce? Open Sores? Open Saws? Tales from the front line

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Credentials

- Not interested in licensing minutiae – happy to be advised what's best (Andrew Charlesworth works in Bristol!)

- Voyage
  - started with Zope (CMS)
  - accelerated by Blackhole (a well known VLE)
  - continues with uPortal (Portal)

- More Project Manager than Developer

- Can write poor code as long as manual is open

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Concerns

- What I have to say is rather prosaic

- Can we have a conversation please?

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Blame management

- What I have to say is also rather frank

- What follows are *not* generalisations

- They are my perceptions of *some* practitioners I *may* have met somewhere on this planet

- The opinions expressed are personal and may not reflect the policies and thinking within my organisation

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Some things that have been painful to learn

- I'm using Zope as an *example* because I've been close to it – could be *any* OSS product/project
- Zope (because of the Python GIL) needs careful treatment on a multi-processor box
- Python runs better on Linux (and MS Windows) than Solaris
- Zope Oracle database adapter was flawed

What might be learned from this pain?

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Things to avoid (I)

- "Our problems are unique" – self-fulfilling

- Not networking

- Not building community – at all scales

- Not having enough development & test server capacity

- Mine's better than yours (Java vs. The Rest)
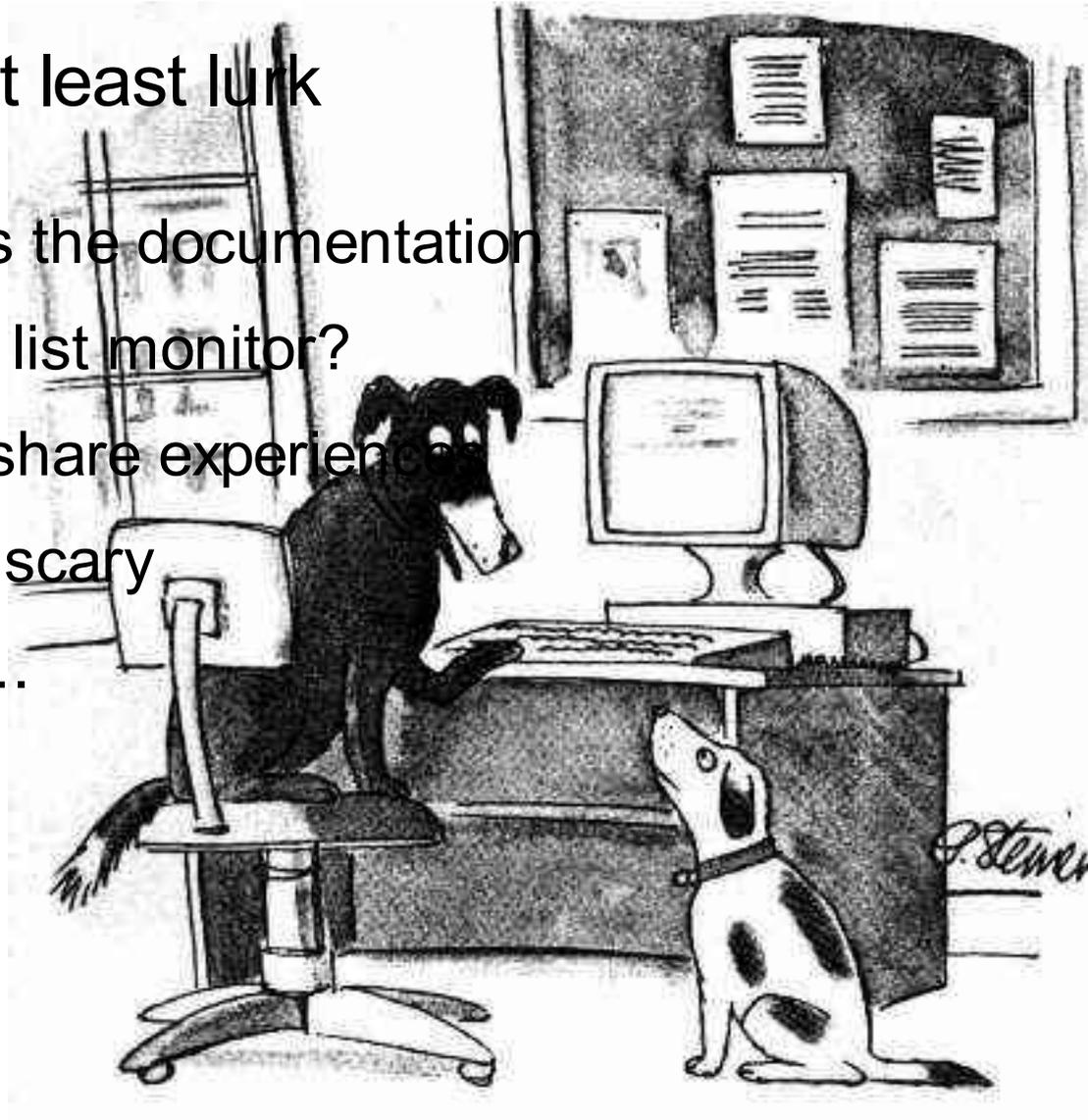
- Too eclectic a mix

Things to avoid (II)

- Paper evaluations – yours or anyone else's

- Being a proud high priest

- Fear of CV dilution

- Free software = no cost of ownership

- Not budgeting for support and consultancy

- Becoming blind to COTS solutions

Everyone can contribute

- Coders

- Testers

- Documenters

- Evangelists

- Taxonomists

- Summarisers

Someone must at least lurk

- The mailing list is the documentation
- Who will be your list monitor?
- You might even share experiences
- Your first post is scary
- But remember ….
- *"On the Internet, no-one knows you're a dog"*

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Making the case

- Intelligence about the sector – who's doing what

- Jumping together – safety in numbers

- UCISA disappointing in this regard

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"Tools"

- Google – copy and paste your error message

- Student projects or vacation employment

- There's got to be more …. audience participation!

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Conclusions (I)

- Because of success with recent projects (often underpinned by open source software) funding is now arriving at a rate that outstrips our ability to translate it into product

- What is core?

- What has become a commodity?

- These are not issues peculiar to open source

- Entertain new models?

The "Legal Services" Model?

- Rob Page, CEO, Zope Corp
  - The law is free
  - But no-one, who can afford it, goes to court without a lawyer
- From where do we get our software lawyers?
- Outsourcing open source?

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Conclusions (II)

- How do we plug the expertise gap (typically we have the expertise but not enough of it)?

- Build relationships with third parties
  - Joint Projects
  - Knowledge transfer