

Initiative for Software Choice - Key Messages

Overarching Mission

The Initiative for Software Choice (ISC, www.softwarechoice.org) is an international coalition of companies and industry associations that believes in the importance of allowing multiple software and hardware development models to compete on their merits, without government mandates that automatically prefer one model to another.

The ISC is organized around the following four principles, which urge governments to:

- Procure software and hardware on their merits, not through categorical preferences;
- Promote broad availability of government funded research;
- Promote interoperability through platform-neutral standards; and
- Maintain a choice of strong intellectual property protections.

Government IT Brings Attention to Underlying Software

Because more and more government services are being delivered via IT systems, lawmakers ask: "How can we get the most out of our IT projects so that taxpayers receive the best value-for-money?" Within this context, the cost-effectiveness of software has come under the spotlight, illuminating vigorous competition between two main models of software development – open source (OSS) and proprietary. Though each model serves the constantly evolving IT marketplace well, a debate has arisen among some policymakers whether to prefer one development model to another, presumably designed to give taxpayers better value-for-money for their government delivered IT services.

A Spate of Software "Preference" Proposals Worldwide

Over the past two years, a whole host of "preference" proposals have surfaced around the globe. The lion's share of these proposals works to automatically favor OSS over other viable alternatives in public procurement, government-funded research and the creation of technical standards. In doing so, the proposals eliminate merit-based choice from the selection process, reducing, or altogether restricting, proprietary options from government consideration.

IT Ecosystem Affected

"Preference" laws harm the overwhelmingly proprietary-based IT industry because government administrators are instructed to automatically acquire or prefer OSS to proprietary offerings. More radically, "preference" proposals represent a fundamental assault on the incentive system that allows the IT industry to flourish and benefit consumers. Not only do they stymie competition in government markets, they signal to the industry that bedrock notions of free market enterprise, intellectual property protections, and the impetus to innovate no longer apply to their products and services. Where this occurs, proprietary

"Preference" Proposals and the ISC

- **"Preference" policies strip merit from the selection process by automatically restricting software choice**
- **"Preference" policies harm the base of the IT industry – its small-to-medium-sized proprietary developers – as well as the competitive IT ecosystem**
- **Governments don't need "preference" laws because the IT market works, enabling them to freely obtain all that the marketplace has to offer**
- **IT choices should be made agnostically, based on a flexible range of factors, such as total cost of operation (TCO)**

and/or hybrid (i.e., mixed) IT companies are unlikely to remain, severely undermining the competitive dynamic that drives the IT ecosystem.

“Preference” Laws Aren’t Needed

By almost any measure, the software market is exceptionally vibrant and competitive. OSS, hybrid, and proprietary options compete head-to-head on a daily basis. Moreover, no law, rule or regulation stands in the way of any government from using the free market to make its IT selections. Consequently, the ISC urges governments to avoid passing “preference” laws because they already have all the tools they need to make informed, merit-based IT choices, looking to all models of development to satisfy their needs.

Neutral Policies Best Benefit Governments, Constituents, the IT Industry

The ISC believes in neutral policies because they enhance choice, rather than limit it. Guided by the competitive IT market, neutral policies maximize the universe of options for government procurement officers, allowing them to find and employ the best, most cost-effective IT solutions for the given need. Not only do such policies make state-delivered IT services the best they can be, they perpetuate competition in the IT industry because they do not arbitrarily cut any one segment of the industry out of the picture for government business.

Choices Should Be Made Objectively, Flexibly, on a Range of Factors

“Preference” laws oversimplify the selection process by using access to source code (or other limiting features) as a shortcut for balanced analysis by government procurement professionals. The ISC believes that how software or hardware gets built guarantees nothing. Only when all options remain on the table can the specific needs of each IT project be met, driven by a flexible range of factors such as total cost of ownership, reliability, security, functionality, ease-of-use, interoperability, access to trained support and staffing, and availability, among others. Procurement shortcuts based primarily on development model shortchange governments and constituents by limiting what can ultimately be chosen for the job at hand.

CompTIA Manages the ISC

The Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) runs the ISC on a day-to-day basis. CompTIA represents the interests of its over 18,000 members in 89 countries, representing a truly broad-based, global industry membership that includes OSS, hybrid and proprietary developers, manufacturers, service providers and resellers. Additionally, CompTIA also writes 11 industry standard, vendor neutral IT certifications that have helped nearly 750,000 individuals gain and demonstrate core IT skills. One such certification is CompTIA's OSS-based *Linux Plus*, an important product for CompTIA's future growth.

ISC in the News

“Why software preference mandates hurt us all,” **NewsForge**, March 3, 2004
<http://www.newsforge.com/print.pl?sid=04/03/02/2217238>

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