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Paylocity saves money developing on Linux

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By: **Tina Gasperson**

Paylocity provides payroll and human resources outsourcing services for companies that don't want the burden of performing those functions in house. Launched in 1997, is is the brainchild of founder Steve Sarowitz, who was previously a salesperson for other payroll companies. "My accountant said I might want to stop making other people rich and do it myself," Sarowitz says. Paylocity was birthed strictly with a Microsoft infrastructure, but over the last six years, open source has made some inroads on the shop floor.

A new-hire vice president of IT first introduced Sarowitz to the concept. "He was passionate about open source. Prior to that we had no open source software whatsoever. But I trusted him implicitly -- he's one of the most brilliant people I know. If he said it, I believed it." The executive said it would be a good cost-saving measure to introduce Linux on servers in the company's data center environment, so that's what Sarowitz did.

Paylocity recently released WebPay 5.0, a custom Web-based payroll system, which was developed on servers also running Linux. Sarowitz says the switch to Linux in the development and Web-facing area of the company saved Paylocity money, and even though the company is using open source tools like **Subversion**, **Issue Manager**, and **CruiseControl**, Sarowitz is not ready to jump into open source with both feet yet. That's probably why Paylocity's developers used **Mono** to get .Net running on Linux for coding and testing WebPay.

"We had a choice, in developing our core product, of going with MySQL and Perl or PHP," Sarowitz says. "We'd actually done our prototype in MySQL and it was just fine."

"There was a lot of functionality built into .Net that made it a natural choice," says Paylocity CIO Chuck Cooper. "The ease of use of the development environment made it easier for us to get up to speed -- and to be honest, we have a relationship with Microsoft and so we're able to leverage their technical expertise. In the Java world, you're on your own."

Sarowitz says he tries to be careful about legal issues when using open source. "We're always concerned when we use open source. We want to make sure our proprietary things stay proprietary, so we keep our open source code segregated from our proprietary code."

For Sarowitz, one of the best aspects of using open source is the community. "We're able to leverage it, and it's a great community of developers out there. If you're dealing with an open source product, you want to make sure it has a community behind it. We're interested in being a good citizen."

Sarowitz says if a company wants to begin using open source, it is important to have the right skill set before taking the leap. "You have to have someone on your staff who understands open source. It's a great way to go if you know what you're doing. It's just like anything else. And don't mix open source with proprietary unless you know what you're doing."

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