Tetra Information Services is a leading Linux migration services company headquartered in New Delhi with offices in Mumbai, Chandigarh and Jammu. Founded by three techno-entrepreneurs in 1994, Tetra Information Services has some big names like Sahara India Pariwar and Bharti Teletech Ltd as its clients. Mukul Mahajan, Deepa Mahajan and Biswajeet Banerjee head the company as its directors. Talking to Samartha Vashishtha, LFY correspondent, Mukul, who handles the marketing operations of the company, shares his views on the current trends in migration services in the industry.

In fact, our success proves that OSS/Linux is not a rare phenomenon at all and companies can thrive on open source. We have more than 150 clients to our credit and the list is continuously increasing.

LFY: How would you convince an IT Manager or a CIO who's wondering if this is the right time to try or deploy OSS/Linux?

OSS provides better ROI and TCO as compared to proprietary solutions in many cases. It also provides interoperability between heterogeneous applications. Because of open standards it avoids vendor lock-in. Companies like IBM, HP, Novell and Red Hat are already providing solutions based on OSS. Most of the MNCs are already implementing or thinking about implementing OSS-based solutions at whatever level is possible. OSS has already changed the market dynamics and become a major market force.

We would recommend IT managers and CIOs to look out for high quality solutions and support, and go ahead with OSS migration in a planned manner.

"Migration involves changing people's mindsets."

LFY: Some say many firms are trying to deploy OSS/Linux, while others say this is a rare phenomenon. What has been your experience in the industry?

OSS is in vogue now days. Multinational companies are deploying OSS for mission-critical applications along with infrastructure applications. We have implemented our solutions in large corporations like Sahara India Pariwar, Godfrey Philips, Toshiba India Ltd, NTPC, etc.

We are also observing a lot of enthusiasm for OSS among SMEs. This segment is out to test everything available on OSS. Forget about the infrastructure solutions, this segment is asking for OSS-based mission critical applications like ERP. We have recently deployed ERP solutions in a multi-location trading company, i.e., Arihant Electricals. We would probably be one of the first companies to develop ERP solutions based on open source in India.

LFY: Support is cited as one of the biggest problems with respect to switching to OSS/Linux, especially due to lack of skilled manpower. What's your take on this?

Support has been a concern area for a long time. But the situation has improved significantly in the last couple of years. There are companies that are providing support on Linux-based solutions—so we would suggest that anybody planning to adopt it should explore the market. But the credentials of the company should be checked before relying on its support.

LFY: What are the common problems encountered by firms that shift to OSS/Linux?

Compatibility with existing applications in a heterogeneous environment is one of the key issues. But with open standards being adopted by most of the vendors, this problem is becoming less each day. Another issue is

availability of drivers with OSS. This problem is more prevalent where the infrastructure is old. But most of the new hardware is coming up with Linux drivers inbuilt. Availability of applications is also a key issue, but that is also getting sorted out as more and more companies adopt open source, and more vendors invest in open source applications.

LFY: **Any tips that you would like to share with IT managers/CIOs on how to handle migration or deployment and the teething troubles involved.**

A well-planned migration reduces most of the teething problems. For migration at the desktop level, we would suggest the desktop should be initially tested in all possible environments by the IT team. After that, proof-of-concept should be done at critical places. This should be followed by deployment in a phased manner. At the server level, proper documented procedures for migration should be in place. These include all aspects of migration, including migration of data.

We would like to emphasise that migration involves people and changing their mindsets. This is one aspect that should not be ignored.

LFY: **What are the various solutions provided by your firm?**

Our solution stack consists of infrastructure solutions like mailing, clusters, firewalls, ERP, desktop/server operating systems, desktop/server management, application servers, identity management, secure network management and content management.

We do provide consultancy for migration and other services like remote management and corporate training.

We are also doing software development on open standard platforms like LAMP, JSP—My SQL, Postgres and Zope/Plone.

LFY: **What is your forte in the field of Linux/OSS solutions?**

We are a technology company with expertise in providing any company a path towards migration to open source technologies in a smooth manner.

We have accumulated knowledge and expertise in the OSS arena over a period of 10 years. We have already come to a level where we can properly guide our clients in all sorts of migration scenarios to the open source stack.

MUKUL MAHAJAN,
director, Tetra Information Services

LFY: Which are the major cases that you would like to highlight w.r.t. Linux implementation, and what was unique about each of them?

The case of Sahara India Pariwar involved migration of various mailing solutions in small pockets (Postmaster, Exchange, Send Mail etc) to a single Q-Mail based server for over 14000 users spread across India.

Bharti Teletech Ltd is another customer who uses Linux-based solutions for its entire infrastructure and development needs. It has its mailing on Q-mail, Internet access through Squid, and its SCM and finance applications are fully developed on Java technologies. We are maintaining the entire infrastructure and developing its applications.

Interarch Building Products Pvt Ltd uses Linux-based solutions for mailing, firewall, Internet access, as well as for running full ERP functions like purchase, stores, excise and accounts. It's a Web-based solution, developed on Java technologies.

PRIA is an NGO, which has implemented Linux-based solutions at the infrastructure level for mailing, proxy and firewall. It also uses Greenstone as a library management solution for its library, and LTSP and thin clients for one of its projects.

LFY: Is skilled manpower a problem area for OSS/Linux players? If yes, how does Tetra handle this challenge?

Skilled manpower has been a problem area with OSS/Linux players for quite some time, but the situation has improved significantly over the last couple of years.

Skilled manpower is always a problem in any field as adoption grows; so it has to be looked at in that light. There are many institutes that have now started laying emphasis on Linux-based courses, especially on Novell/SUSE and Red Hat.

We address this challenge by continuously training people on new technologies, providing them with challenging work that satisfies them and then retaining them.

LFY: What kind of alliances does Tetra have? How do these help you?

In India we have alliances with all the major OSS providers, which includes IBM, Novell and Red Hat. We are Linux leader of IBM, Gold Partner and Authorised Support Partner for Novell, and Channel Partner of Red Hat. We are also actively looking at partnerships with overseas open source companies who want to have a presence in India.

> **Skilled manpower has been a problem area with OSS/Linux players for quite some time, but the situation has improved significantly over the last couple of years.**

> **We have recently deployed ERP solutions in a multi-location trading company, i.e., Arihant Electricals. We would probably be one of the first companies to develop ERP solutions based on open source in India.**

LFY: How has your growth been over the past years? What are your plans for expansion over the next 2-3 years?

In the last two quarters we have already grown by more than 100 per cent as compared to the previous year, and we are expecting a growth of more than 200 per cent in the next two quarters.

For the next two years we have plans to start up at least two new offices—one somewhere down South and the other in the US. We are already working out the possibility of starting up the US office soon, through an alliance.

Our major chunk of revenue comes from Indian clients, but we have done a few projects with international clients—primarily on remote management.

LFY: A common question that readers keep asking us is: how do firms make money in a paradigm where the source code is open? What kind of unconventional business practices exist that many of us are not aware of?

The ability to modify source code so as to provide high quality solutions is the secret of success for any company in this arena.

Once the source code is open it becomes an even playing field for everybody. This increases competition, which ultimately leads to lower prices and high quality solutions.

With our expertise in providing cost-effective business solutions, we are thriving in the market.

Once a company develops solutions and products, all one requires is to reach the customers and communicate the potential benefits.

LFY: Is it true that a typical OSS/Linux professional gets paid more than one who is a Windows-based professional?

It is all a question of demand and supply. With a shortage of supply of high quality manpower in the market, OSS/Linux professionals are definitely commanding better salaries at this moment.

LFY: What would your advice be to those contemplating careers in open source technologies?

It is an excellent time to enter the market as Linux/OSS professionals. Linux professionals are enjoying a premium in the market at this moment.