

Small college saves big with OpenOffice.org and Linux

By [Tina Gasperson](#) on April 05, 2005 (8:00:00 AM)

[Bacone College](#) in Muskogee, Oklahoma, is an outreach of the American Baptist Association (ABA) to Native Americans, and is Oklahoma's oldest center for higher education, established in 1880. The small, four-year liberal arts school doesn't receive any form of government funding, so finding economical ways to provide the best education possible is a priority for the staff. Recently, Bacone's technologist Robert Duncan III, transferred a Linux hobby into huge savings for the school's IT department.

Duncan came on the scene at the beginning of 2003, as his father, Robert Duncan Jr., was appointed president of Bacone by the ABA. The need for improvement in the IT department was obvious: all the computer labs were running on Pentium 133 hardware and Windows 98. The desktops were constantly crashing and hard drive failures were becoming a daily event. Complicating the issue, Microsoft was withdrawing technical support, effectively forcing the college to make a large expenditure, not only in upgrading the operating system but also in hardware purchases since Windows XP doesn't run very well on anything less than a 300MHz CPU.

Bacone needed to replace 45 desktop computers and purchase licenses not only for 45 copies of Window XP, but also for 45 copies of Microsoft Office. Enter creative thinking. Duncan, a business major, began using Linux in high school, and discovered OpenOffice.org shortly after that. Realizing that the free, full-featured replacement for Microsoft Office would be a perfect solution, he set out to convince his father and the staff.

Duncan said that faculty and staff were reluctant to embrace OpenOffice.org simply because they had a hard time believing that a free product could adequately replace a \$450 copy of Microsoft Office. But Duncan was about to stumble upon something that would help them "see the light."

"I was driving back to Oklahoma from New Jersey after Christmas break, and on a whim decided to stop at an all-night bookstore in Nashville," he says. "I found a book called 'OOoSwitch: 501 Things You Wanted to Know About Switching to OpenOffice.org.'" In that book were all the objections he'd been hearing along with explanations about how to perform the desired task in OpenOffice.org. "Now every time someone said OpenOffice.org couldn't do something, I had this book that said, 'yes it could.'"

On top of that, Duncan contacted Wal-Mart and was able to order 45 new \$199 computers without operating systems. Now, for less than what the upgraded Microsoft licenses would have cost, he had 45 new warranted systems with Windows 98 (transferred and removed from the old hardware, which is legal under the Windows 98 EULA) and OpenOffice.org.

The creativity didn't stop there: the 45 Pentium 133's, now "stuffed full of RAM" and with faulty hard drives removed, are sporting shiny new copies of Knoppix Linux running off of CDs. These ingeniously recycled workstations are strategically located in public areas around the campus, providing Internet access in easy to administer and maintain packages. "There's no monitoring or reconfiguring to do," says Duncan. "We just reboot."

Duncan remains pleased with the results of his creativity. "This puts us in control of our tech resources, instead of relying on some third party. It's kind of a scary to say there's some company out there telling me I'm going to buy a new computer every two years. We've doubled the number of computers we have available to us with the cost-savings of OpenOffice.org versus Microsoft Office. We've made available open access to labs and cyber cafes using hardware that others would have just thrown away.

"OpenOffice.org made a lot of that possible."