

AMTRON delivers 28,000 Ubuntu-based PCs to students in Assam

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Summary

India-based government information and communication technologies (ICT) provider The Assam Electronics Development Corporation (AMTRON) needed to provide every Assam student who achieved 60 per cent or higher in their school leaving exams with a free PC. AMTRON needed to comply with strict budgets to deliver reliable, easy-to-use PCs to thousands of students. It finally decided on a range of PC hardware running Ubuntu Desktop Edition. It delivered 14,000 Ubuntu-based PCs in 2008 and is in the process of delivering a further 14,000 Ubuntu-based PCs in 2009. The cost-effective Ubuntu Desktop Edition solution is free, easy to use and very popular with the students of Assam.

Challenge

The Assam Electronics Development Corporation (AMTRON) is responsible for implementing a range of IT programmes on behalf of the government of Assam. One of its key projects is the Anundoram Borooah Award Scheme (ARBAS), which gives a free PC to every student in Assam who achieves 60 per cent or higher in their high-school leaving exams.

This incentive scheme was initiated in 2005 and has seen thousands of students boost their computer literacy skills as a result. MK Yadava, Managing Director, AMTRON, says: “Our main concern is how we can deliver several thousand reliable PCs to students within our given budget constraints. We considered and dismissed Microsoft Windows-based PCs as an option because they were too expensive.”

AMTRON initially opted to distribute PCs based on Red Hat Fedora. Yadava says: “We realised that open source was the best option and went for Fedora. While the first three years were certainly a success, some students who were used to working with Microsoft technologies had trouble familiarising themselves with the new system.”

After further evaluating its options AMTRON decided to introduce Ubuntu Desktop Edition. Yadava says: “We wanted to find a system that could reach out to students in a more familiar manner. We also needed a desktop operating system that supported greater integration with local languages. After testing a range of operating systems, we decided that Ubuntu Desktop Edition was the easiest to use.”

The Ubuntu Desktop solution

By the end of 2009, AMTRON will have distributed 28,000 PCs based on Ubuntu Desktop Edition. Yadava says: “We deployed 14,000 Ubuntu-based PCs in 2008 and we’re in the process of deploying a further 14,000 this year.”





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The PC manufacturers install Ubuntu Desktop Edition on each of the machines, after which they are sent to around 40 venues across Assam. Eligible students are then invited to collect their free PC at a pre-arranged date and time. AMTRON staff then check that students are comfortable with the operating system and applications before they take their PCs home.

Yadava says: “We make sure that each student knows how to perform basic tasks such as playing CDs, surfing the web and compiling spreadsheets. But Ubuntu Desktop Edition is so intuitive that they tend to understand the basics very quickly.”

Following the success of the ARBAS project, AMTRON is also deploying 6,400 Ubuntu-based PCs to more than 640 schools throughout Assam. Each school will have a computer lab, which will house 10 Ubuntu-based PCs each

Results

Ease of use boosts student computer literacy

With boosting computer literacy a key priority for the ARBAS project, finding an easy-to-use, intuitive operating system was essential. Ubuntu Desktop Edition enables the students to create documents, spreadsheets, drawings and presentations hassle-free. Yadava says: “The office applications in Ubuntu are familiar, intuitive and far better than Microsoft Office when it comes to feature-richness, total cost of ownership and value for money.

“The Ubuntu-based PCs are of huge benefit to the students of Assam. They have all the educational programmes they need – from word processing to spreadsheet creation – and it’s all ready to go from day one. The fact that Ubuntu is so user-friendly means that they can get up and running really quickly.”

Local language support simplifies PC use

Because Ubuntu Desktop Edition comes with language packs for more than 150 languages, AMTRON was confident that the free PCs offered superior localisation capabilities. It worked in tandem with Ubuntu sponsor Canonical to incorporate local language support into the operating system prior to distribution.

Yadava says: “We’d had issues in the past because a lack of local language support meant that students had difficulty understanding how to make the best possible use of their new PCs. It’s simply not a problem with Ubuntu Desktop Edition. The Canonical team worked with us to incorporate local language support well ahead of time. As a result, students can navigate their way round the Ubuntu operating system quickly and easily.”

Cost-Effective solution provides 28,000 students with free PCs

AMTRON must ensure that it delivers the ambitious ARBAS incentive scheme within tight government budgets. The cost-effective nature of the Ubuntu Desktop Edition solution has enabled the ICT provider to distribute 28,000 PCs without over-spending.

Yadava says: “The fact that the Ubuntu Desktop Edition software was cost-effective, helped us to deliver the project well within budget. The free updates that come as standard with the six-monthly releases also ensure that students will have a reliable desktop solution, which they don’t have to pay to frequently upgrade.”

