Build an MSP on Open Source

A series on building a Managed Service Provider business using Open Source software and tools.

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Introduction to the Series

Part 1: Introduction to MSP on Open Source

https://www.youtube.com/embed/zhK0sARGhYc

In this episode, I discuss the opportunity and venture of starting an MSP (Managed Service Provider) using open source tools and software. This video is an introduction on what I will cover at the onset of our series. Based on my last series about building a business (more generally) on open source, I got a ton of great feedback on other tools and things I may have overlooked, so I'll be adding those to this series as the business grows over time, and such tools become more necessary. I'll cover many of those things we know (or hope) we'll need as well, such as HR and Payroll, Time and Attendance, Time Tracking, Reporting, perhaps even contracts and e-signatures, etc.

Any business has a vast need of software, and much of that software (if not all of it) is covered with incredible, powerful, open source solutions. My previous series was a toe in the water, whereas this series is based on my desire to start and grow an MSP business, that would ideally be my full time job at some point in the future. I hope you'll come along on this journey with me, and help me build a community around it. A community where we can share ideas, best practices, post problems and solutions, and really become the go to knowledge holders for MSP startups and long-time businesses alike.

What we'll cover initially

To begin, we need a few things to serve even the most basic first client.

1. A domain name with DNS options for setting A records and CNAME records at a minimum
2. Email with SMTP options (a professional email is always best, and based on your domain name is even better)
3. VPN - I'll be using Netbird and Wireguard for this purpose, but feel free to use any of the amazing open source options out there.
4. RMM (Remote Monitoring and Maintenance) software - Combination of MeshCentral and Zabbix
5. Remote Desktop support software - RustDesk
6. Backup Solutions
7. (Optional, but highly recommended) SSO Solution for internal use as well as for clients as needed - Authentik

8. Some level of skill with IT, Netwroking, Infrastructure
9. Pricing
    1. Invoicing / Quoting / Estimations / Expenses - Starting with Invoice Ninja, but may move to something else due to lack of SSO options on Self Hosted version.
10. ... and most important of all a first client who is ecstatic about our service.

> I'm going to add a few other items here, as folks have been asking, and I think it's important to keep this list up to date as we go.

- Ticketing System - Zammad
- Virtualization Orchestrator - Proxmox
- Networking (SDN) - OpenWisp2
- Documentation / Knowledge Base - Bookstack
- Internal / External Communication
    - Chat - RocketChat
    - Video / Audio WebRTC - Jitsi Meet
- Synced Files and Office Suite - NextCloud
- HR- ?
- Payroll - ?
- Scheduling
    - Employees / Shifts - ?
    - Self / Meetings with Clients - ?
- Marketing - ?

This is just the beginning of what we'll need and want to do as an MSP, but it's a real start toward what we can and will accomplish on this venture. I have asked myself a few times now, is this really a road I want to go down so publicly? What if I fall flat on my face? What good are videos where you fail miserably?

I finally realized, that if you don't try, it definitely won't happen, and perhaps the pressure of the series will help me strive harder to be successful. Even if I do fail, however, you will get the benefit of knowing what I did, and you can pivot, and try to correct where I messed up.

Pricing and Time Reporting

In the video I showed my initial run at a pricing calculator, so I'll be posting it here soon. I'm just getting it all ready so it's easy to understand. Feel free to download it, and put it to use as you see fit.

You can find it here: Pricing Worksheet

I'll also be posting a sheet I use to show my client (yes, just the 1 for now) that I am more than worth the monthly money they spend on me.

You can find that sheet here: Time Reporting Sheet

Again, feel free to grab it and do with it as you see fit. I'll put both in a gitlab repo, and if you make improvements, please do a pull request so we can all benefit.

I hope you'll love this series, I know it's extremely exciting for me, and I"m so looking forward to getting this going.

Let's do this!