

October 12, 2007

Brett Fincaryk
Useful Corporation
Unit 400, 3 Fan Tan Alley
Victoria, BC, V8W 3G9

Dear Mr. Fincaryk,

There are not many companies that understand what it means to provide reliable and safe public access computing—the unique and intensive process of exposing a personal tool to the public. Certainly, the challenges we at Schlow have faced with previous solutions stem from that paradoxical relationship. That is why the Useful approach is such a breath of fresh air; leveraging the power of open source software to create (from the ground up) a truly *public* computing environment is quite revolutionary.

Since going live with our DiscoverStation and Prebook system last year, it has been very clear to me what a valuable approach this is. Gone are the days where our staff was stuck in the middle of a ‘blame game’ between the companies providing our hardware, operating system, applications, antivirus, desktop security, and patron/print management. Configuring *everything*, from installed applications, to policy agreements, to print costs, all through a web browser, is not something I ever thought I’d see. What impresses me even more is how well your company listens. If we tell you something we’d like to be different, you respond: from taking a software adjustment we’ve tinkered with and rolling it into the next release, to developing a new product from scratch (DiscoverPrint). That is service!

The hardware is itself a marvel. I was amazed at how much we had to adjust the thermostat in our computer lab when we replaced 10 Gates Foundation machines with two 5-seat DiscoverStations. PC’s consume a lot of energy, and unchecked, could quickly heat a room to their own demise. This worrisome factor has been considerably diminished with the Useful ‘one box’ model.

Surely there has been some adjustment for our patrons. While office application suites are not all the same, they generally seem to have the same features. Training is something librarians take in stride, and we are delighted to find many of our patrons excited to be using our “cool new interface,” and enjoying the benefits that open source software affords. Others never even notice that something has changed.

We know what has changed. I can confidently forward any support issues to one location, and expect a friendly company to respond with equal parts accountability and innovation. I am very pleased with our relationship with Useful, and look forward to its continued partnership in providing our patrons what they deserve: a public access computing system.

Sincerely,
Nathaniel Rasmussen
Computer Systems Administrator