

Eish - 2005! What A Year for OpenLab! A message from Denis Brandjes, MD, OpenLab International.

Sitting and pondering the year, this last day of 2005, and all I can say is *Eish!* According to [Wikipedia](#), *Eish!*, is a general exclamation, or an expression of surprise or disbelief, in [South African English](#).

FLOSS Focus


2005 saw huge changes for [OpenLab International](#) as a company. Most importantly, the evolution and focusing of the company from a broad-based ICT company, to a specialised software development house, focused on the development, sales and deployment of [Free/Libre/ Open Source Software \(FLOSS\)](#). The niche market though, being education, has not changed, although the products and services now have greater appeal and application in the additional home, small business and thin-client markets.



Products and Services


With this evolution saw the development and release of some excellent products. [OpenLab4](#) is the latest release of [OpenLab's GNU/Linux Operating System](#), and this release sees huge product evolution and stability, as well as increased adoption, both in Africa and more internationally. OpenLab4 is available in a 3-CD set, namely LIVEcd, POWERcd and KARMAcd, and has received huge acclaim from media, reviewers and users.




Late November saw the much-anticipated release of [EduKar](#), THE educational software and content solution for Linux. EduKar is much improved and beefier **EDUpack**, with over 90 platform-neutral and Linux-based applications, tools and content, integrated in one easy menu interface. EduKar's predecessor, EDUpack, is already deployed in about 500 sites across Africa, with the EduKar upgrade scheduled in over 400 Namibian sites from January 2006!

Furthermore, OpenLab's development of [Bespoke \(Custom\) Software](#) for select clients continued. As an example, The **SNNApack** developed for [SchoolNet Namibia](#) ensures the installation and customisation of complex servers, including OpenLab4, applications, network services, mail and Internet, and EduKar, with minimal technician intervention - over 10Gb of software and data and all within an hour! And in the midst of this, a number of smaller applications and tools were developed during the year, mostly being released freely on the Internet. These include [TappyTux](#), [DireqCafe](#) and [Slapt-Gui](#), mostly at the hands of OpenLab's Chief Software Architect, [A J Venter](#).

Most excitingly, OpenLab has an amazing list of products in development or planned for 2006. These include **OpenTracker** (a data gathering and application usage tool for specific use in Monitoring and Evaluation of ICT resources), **NeutrEDU** (EduKar-lite for Windows) and **OpenConneq4** (the connectivity solution for schools, homes, small business and InterNet Cafes). And then there are those products in development that are so HOT that we cannot hint at them yet :-)


A most exciting venture started in 2005 was that of [HaiTi!](#), the comic produced by [SchoolNet Namibia](#), [Strika Entertainment](#) and [OpenLab International](#). HaiTi! Is the grassroots project to get SchoolNet information and OpenLab training to the masses in Namibia. November 2005 saw the release of the [second Annual](#), in partnership with the [Namibian Newspaper](#).

Customers

2005 also saw a change in the manner of distribution and sales of OpenLab's solutions. Although a large number of products are freely available from the company directly, including OpenLab4 GNU/Linux, OpenLab chose to adopt a Channel Partner Program, thus appointing distribution partners for product lines and/or territories. One such partner company, [Olamandla Technologies](#), was spawned with the assistance of OpenLab in mid-2005. [Contact us](#) for information regarding the Channel Partner Program.

[SchoolNet Namibia](#) continues to be the largest user of OpenLab and its products, dominating the Namibian schools sector, with more than 400 schools (out of a total of 1600 schools in Namibia), Resource Centres, Teacher Training Colleges and homes using OpenLab solutions (as at September 2005), although 5,000 copies of OpenLab4-LIVEcd are currently in distribution across Namibia (and in SchoolNet-related exercises across Africa). At WSIS alone, almost 1,000 CDs were handed out to international delegates, thanks to SchoolNet Namibia!



Of strategic importance has been the distribution and downloads of OpenLab4-LIVEcd. Currently, 8,000 CDs have been printed (since September 2005), and most have been distributed. As for downloads, OpenLab4-LIVEcd has had unprecedented support. Since October 2005, three monitored and managed servers alone have recorded 340Gb of downloads, equating to 480 complete downloads. This excludes the larger international servers and BitTorrents, which are more difficult to gauge and monitor.

The marketing and mind-share of OpenLab International has certainly also increased dramatically. The company's new web presence, www.getopenlab.com was established on 23 July 2005, and in the less than six-months of operation, has attracted 605,558 hits to date. As for all the publicity, just [google us](#) or check some of the reports at www.getopenlab.com.

Company Changes



Apart from the change in focus and distribution methodology, the company also differentiated the development imperatives of the company from operational and deployment responsibilities, thus appointing distribution partners. This also meant that rather than maintaining offices in numerous cities across Africa, OpenLab would operate from a corporate head office, certainly in the short-term. The company moved into new offices in Parktown, Johannesburg, South Africa in April 2005.

In line with the company vision changes, a name change was undertaken. [Direq International](#) has been operational since 2001, responsible for educational ICT companies throughout Africa. 2005 saw the evolution of Direq International to [OpenLab International](#), to better represent product areas and focus of the company.

Furthermore, in December 2005, OpenLab bid farewell to [Mr. Andy Kiloh](#), co-founder of the company since 2001. Although Andy remains a minority shareholder of OpenLab International, he leaves the executive management and operational responsibilities of OpenLab in order to fulfil his chosen responsibilities within [Olamandla Technologies](#), together with partner [Mr. Mandla Mtsweni](#). OpenLab takes this opportunity to thank Andy for his considerable contribution to the company, and wishes him well in his new ventures (which are at a mere arms' length from his roots).

OpenLab welcomes [Mr. A.J. Venter](#), Chief Software Architect of OpenLab, as a shareholder in the company, joining majority shareholder and MD, [Mr. Denis Brandjes](#), and Mr. Andy Kiloh.

2006 in sight

With loads of changes and accomplishments 'under the belt' in 2005, OpenLab International has even greater expectations for 2006! The New Year will see a slew of new product releases, and aims at gaining greater market share, particularly in the international educational sector. Furthermore, this new year will see the start of loan financing to expand markets, and shareholding / investment changes, that will further position OpenLab for international growth.

In closing, I will take this opportunity to thank our staff, shareholders, partners, friends, customers, and soon-to-be friends for their vision, passion, support and contributions to OpenLab's success. May 2006 bring success beyond our wildest dreams!

