

Re: University License fees are short sighted of Wolfram Research

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.math.symbolic/2005-03/0219.html>

From: Dave (nospam_at_nowhere.com)

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Richard Fateman wrote:

> *Dave wrote:*

>

>

>> <snip>

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>> *What would happen if it was free?*

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>> *The usage would dramatically rise.*

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> *My guess is that you are wrong here.*

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> *This assumes a kind of elastic market that probably does*

> *not exist. By your reasoning every piece of free software*

> *would be used by every student.*

No, I am **not** claiming every bit of free software would be used by every student. How you infer that from what I wrote I do not know.

Whilst I might guess some historians studying 17th century literature might use Mathematica, the product will only really be used in any great number in science, engineering and maths courses, with lesser (if any) usage on other courses.

But providing it free would likely mean it would likely to be taught in just about every physics, engineering and maths course. I know it is used in computer science too.

I know that several years ago a decision was made in my department not to contribute any more toward the cost of a university site license for Mathematica, on the grounds of cost and the number of users. That effectively reduced the number of users to about 3 in a department of

150 or so staff. There must be 50+ staff using Matlab.

The uni still has a site license – but since we don't contribute to that cost, we don't use it unless we buy a copy, as I have done.

To a large extent, the number of undergrad students using a product is set by the number of lecturers/post-docs that use the product. And that is set to a large degree by the cost of the product. If two products are each capable of doing the required task, the cheaper or one best known to that individual will generally be bought.

- > *If Mathematica dropped its*
- > *price, it might sell about the same number. The number*
- > *is bounded by the "math geek population" more than the*
- > *"population with \$20 to spend".*

But where I work at least, it is not someone with \$20 to spend, but (for staff like myself) someone with around \$360/year to spend. I know with 100% certainty that we no longer use it much due to the cost. Nobody is too keen either on software that stops working after a certain date. No longer being able to get support and updates is not such an issue, but it is not too tempting to buy something that you know will stop working.

I can't say how many more users there would be, but believe it would be significant.

And I know there is talk of not renewing the site license any more. With around 20,000 students (many on mathematically based courses), that would be a loss of Wolfram Research's potential future sales.

- > *In reality, most people in their jobs do not even need*
- > *Matlab (whose numerical-only capabilities are much less ambitious*
- > *than Mathematica or Maple or ...). The employer is*
- > *much more likely to provide a license for Microsoft*
- > *Powerpoint or Excel to each technical employee.*

Matlab has a toolbox for symbolic maths, which still does add much to the cost. Someone told me the symbolic toolbox for Matlab is a cut-down version of Maple, but I don't know if that is true.

- > *It is a relatively small market, and "several million"*
- > *is probably inflated.*

I suspect that too.