

What is Free Software and Why Should I Care ?

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Who am I ?

- Have been working on Free Software/Open Source Software since mid '90s
- Has been my profession since 1997 :)
- Mostly work with Linux

Overview of workshop

- Three threads to talk about
 - Practicalities of Free Software
 - Philosophy behind Free Software
 - Open Standards / Open Document Formats
- Some demonstrations
- Questions welcome at any time

So what is Free Software ?

Free Software is a source of well designed, mature, secure and usable software to achieve just about any task you can think of.

Free Software includes Word Processors, Spreadsheets, Web Browsers, Email Clients, PDF viewers, Operating Systems, Databases, Scientific Packages, Games, Bible Concordances...

Over 65% of the websites in the world are running on Free software

Free Software has a strong emphasis on Open Standards and Open Document Formats

Free software is a matter of the users' freedom to run, copy, distribute, study, change and improve the software.

- Richard M Stallman, Free Software Foundation (FSF)

- Think of “free” as in “freedom” rather than “free beer”
 - Both concepts are true of most Free Software
- Source Code of the software is readily available
 - Source Code is the “recipe” from which the software is constructed, end result is the instructions the computer executes
 - Licence terms dictate permitted use and prevents abuse
 - Subject to normal Copyright

- Free Software versus Open Source Software
 - Open Source Software and Free Software sometimes described as two political camps within the same overall movement
 - Open Source Software definitions looser/more liberal than Free Software
 - Will tend to use terms interchangeably and/or FOSS for short
- Shareware/Freeware are different to FOSS
- Free Software doesn't mean stealing proprietary software!

Who writes this stuff ?

Majority of Free and Open Source Software written by loose knit group of people around the world - “The Community”

- Motivated largely by personal challenge / intellectual curiosity
- Tends to be fairly collegiate, most of the time
- A meritocracy - quality of what you contribute is what matters
- Personal pride encourages good results
- Peer review ensures security
- Size estimates vary but many thousands actively developing

How is Free Software produced ?

Many projects get started to address an individuals requirement -
“Scratching an Itch”

Typical development cycle

- Code is written
- Made available when ready
- Enhancements/fixes received and incorporated
- Rinse, repeat

Majority of communication/collaboration virtual

Free Software is made available freely for download on the Internet and/or packaged into complete systems by various organisations or companies.

Visibility of Source Code leads to more secure & reliable systems

Increasing corporate involvement has been largely positive

- Involvement either on specific projects or across the board
- OSDL, Apache Foundation, Mozilla Foundation, MySQL etc.
- IBM, Intel, HP, Oracle, Apple, RedHat and SuSE etc.
- Most, though not all key developers now employed specifically to work on FOSS
- Does not equate to ownership or leverage

- Kubuntu
- Open Office
- Bible concordance
- Firefox
- Korganizer

Open *Standards* allow systems, software and/or hardware, to work together irrespective of who makes them

- The growth of the Internet just one example
- FOSS is very Open Standards compliant

Open *Formats* allow information to be exchanged between different systems by defining a common internal format

- For example, defining text styles and formatting in a wordprocessor
- Consider how you will access your electronic data in five years from now...
- Consider how your church historian will access electronic records in 15 years from now...
- FOSS is very Open Formats compliant

Philosophical aspects aside, there are a number of practical reasons to use FOSS and/or Open Formats

- Break upgrade cycles
 - From a consumerism standpoint, recognise that these cycles are largely artificial
 - Hardware remains productive for longer
 - Old hardware can be pressed into service
 - Software need only be upgraded if you need new features
- No licensing costs, low or no “per seat” charges
- When properly installed, very secure
- Ensures your organisations data will be accessible without being beholden to any other groups

- Free Software Foundation <http://fsf.org>
- Open Source Software Organisation <http://opensource.org>
- Linux Australia <http://linux.org.au>
- Kubuntu <http://kubuntu.org>
- Open Office <http://openoffice.org>
- Firefox <http://firefox.org>
- Open Source Software for Windows <http://www.theopencd.org>
<http://osswin.sourceforge.net>
- CrossWire Bible Society <http://www.crosswire.org>