Michael Weyman 11/24/13

Software licensing is a way for software companies to allow programmers like myself to mess with their software’s code without infringing on the copyright laws of that software. Licenses may have to be purchased, or you may have to get permission from the company itself. An open source license is practically “free”. With an open source program you generally do not have to ask for permission to use the code. You can also copy and reuse code in other programs without copywriting it.

Free software is specifically released for the purpose of modifying and reusing its code. Free software is released with the freedom to study, freedom to adapt or modify, and freedom to distribute to whomever you need to. Another type of license is copyleft. Copyleft is a type of license where a company gives you all the freedom of open source software, but whatever changes you make and distribute must be allowed to be modifiable as well.

There are some drawbacks to software licensing. If you don’t understand the code itself you may have a problem. Most of the open source software “owners” are not with the company they programmed the code for or they are retired. So if you have any problems with the code being out dated or just a misunderstanding, you can go to the source and ask questions. That being said, you must understand basic business logic to know what to edit in the code, and most of the open source code I’ve seen is very unorganized and messy.

A viral license is a license which is open source, but your finished product must be compatible with the parent program. This allows for people to understand the code more easily, and make adjustments accordingly.

The GPLv3 license believes that no one should be restricted by any software they use. This license believes that all users have four freedoms. “The freedom to use the software for any purpose, the freedom to change the software to suit your needs, the freedom to share the software with your friends and neighbors, and the freedom to share the changes you make.” (<http://www.gnu.org/licenses/quick-guide-gplv3.html>) Any code you release with this license must stay free, meaning that this is a copyleft license.

The LGPL license allows for distributing the code, but no changes are allowed to be made. This makes it difficult for companies to use the program, unless it fits the specific needs. The only advantage to the LGPL license is that you will always have a working application. The code will always work; if it didn’t work they would not release it.

The MPL or Mozilla license is an open source license developed by the Mozilla Foundation. This license is a hybrid of the modified BSD license and the LGPL license. This license is mostly used for software made by Mozilla as well, including Mozilla Firefox and Mozilla Thunderbird. This license seeks to balance the concerns of all open source developers.

Out of the three licenses I’ve researched, I favor GPLv3 over the others. The reasoning behind my choice is easy, GPLv3 has the least restrictions. It allows you to change the program unlike LGPL, and it is widely used unlike MPL.