The Free Software Foundation, an ethical rise to success

Cathal O'Grady

DCU

The Free Software Foundation(FSF) was founded by Richard Stallman in 1985. It followed Stallmans launch of the GNU project in 1983. From this came the GNU operating system which was a clone of the proprietary UNIX operating system. The foundation was started in protest against a trend of proprietary software development like UNIX at the time. Stallman had experienced first hand the freedom of software that is unrestricted, shareable and modifiable when working at MIT and criticised proprietary software for it subjugating its users and restricting their computing.

The foundation proposed four freedoms under which free software must be defined

- Use - use the software with no restrictions
- Study - study the source code
- Share - make and share a copy of the software
- Improve - make and share a modified version of the software

The foundation driven by Stallman eventually acquired the GNU General Public License(GPL) in 1989 for which software under it would need to respect the aforementioned freedoms. This license allowed those who rejected proprietary software peace of mind in finding software that would respect their freedom.

Early on the FSF didn't make much money at all. That was until in 1991 when the linux kernel, the final piece of the GNU operating system, was released under the GPL. It was then that users began using GNU/linux and the FSF could provide services to those people. It is admirable that a company can stick to its principles and still more than capably fund itself.

While my ideals don't fully align with Stallman on issues outside of computers, I do agree with a lot on what the FSF is built on. I find the success impressive and politics a side, the software they maintain very powerful.

- On a side note I wrote this blog using software maintained by the FSF, GNU Troff(groff).

Sources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Software_Foundation
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GNU_General_Public_License
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linux_kernel
https://fsfe.org/freesoftware/
https://www.gnu.org/software/groff/