Unlicense

The **Unlicense** is a public domain equivalent license with a focus on an anti-copyright message. It was first published on January 1 (Public Domain Day), 2010. The Unlicense offers a public domain waiver text with a fall-back public-domain-like license, inspired by permissive licenses but without an attribution clause.[3][4] In 2015, GitHub reported that approximately 102,000 of their 5.1 million licensed projects (2% of licensed projects on GitHub.com) use the Unlicense.[5]

Contents

Unlicense	
Unlicense logo	
Author	Arto Bendiken
SPDX identifier	Unlicense
FSF approved	Yes[1]
OSI approved	Yes[2]
GPL compatible	Yes[1]
Copyleft	No[1]
Linking from code with a different licence	Yes
Website	unlicense.org (http://unlicense.org)

History

In a post published on January 1 (Public Domain Day), 2010, Arto Bendiken outlined his reasons for preferring public domain software, namely: the nuisance of dealing with licensing terms (for instance license incompatibility), the threat inherent in copyright law, and the impracticability of copyright law.[6]

On January 23, 2010, Bendiken followed-up on his initial post. In this post, he explained that the Unlicense is based on the copyright waiver of SQLite with the no-warranty statement from the MIT License. He then walked through the license, commenting on each part.[7]

In a post published in December 2010, Bendiken further clarified what it means to "license" and "unlicense" software.[8]

On January 1, 2011, Bendiken reviewed the progress and adoption of the Unlicense. He admits that it is "difficult to give estimates of current Unlicense adoption" but suggests there are "many hundreds of projects using the Unlicense".[9]

In January 2012, when discussed on OSI's license-review mailing list, the Unlicense was brushed off as a crayon license.[10] A request for legacy approval was filed in March 2020,[11] which led to a formal approval in June 2020.[2]

License terms

The license terms of the Unlicense is as follows:[4]

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This is free and unencumbered software released into the public domain.

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distribute this software, either in source code form or as a compiled
binary, for any purpose, commercial or non-commercial, and by any
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OTHER DEALINGS IN THE SOFTWARE.

For more information, please refer to <http://unlicense.org/>
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Reception

The Free Software Foundation states that "Both public domain works and the lax license provided by the Unlicense are compatible with the GNU GPL." However, for dedicating software to the public domain it recommends CC0 over the Unlicense, stating that CC0 "is more thorough and mature than the Unlicense".[1]

The Fedora Project recommends CC0 over the Unlicense because the former is "a more comprehensive legal text".[12]

Google does not allow contributions to projects under public domain equivalent licenses like the Unlicense (and CC0), while allowing contributions to 0BSD licensed and US government PD projects.[13]

In December 2010, Mike Linksvayer, the vice president of Creative Commons at the time, wrote in an identi.ca conversation "I like the movement" in speaking of the Unlicense effort.[14][15]

The Unlicense has been criticized, for instance by the OSI, for being possibly inconsistent and non-standard, and for making it difficult for some projects to accept Unlicensed code as third-party contributions; leaving too much room for interpretation; and possibly being incoherent in some legal systems.[16][17][10]

Notable projects that use the Unlicense include youtube-dl,[18] Second Reality,[19] and the Gloom source code.[20]

See also

- CC0
- WTFPL
- Comparison of free and open-source software licenses

References

1. "Various Licenses and Comments about Them - GNU Project § The Unlicense" (https://www.gnu.org/licenses/license-list.en.html#Unlicense). Free Software Foundation. Retrieved February 10, 2017.

2. Chestek, Pamela (June 16, 2020). "[License-review] Request for legacy approval: The Unlicense" (http://lists.opensource.org/pipermail/license-review_lists.opensource.org/2020-June/004890.html). Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20200908144433/http://lists.opensource.org/pipermail/license-review_lists.opensource.org/2020-June/004890.html) from the original on September 8, 2020. "There is general agreement that the document is poorly drafted. It is an attempt to dedicate a work to the public domain (which, taken alone, would not be approved as an open source license) but it also has wording commonly used for license grants.There was some discussion about the legal effectiveness of the document, in particular how it would operate in a jurisdiction where one cannot dedicate a work to the public domain. The lawyers who opined on the issue, both US and non-US, agreed that the document would most likely be interpreted as a license and that the license met the OSD. It is therefore recommended for approval."

3. Joe Brockmeier (January 11, 2010). "The Unlicense: A License for No License" (https://web.archive.org/web/20170122063132/http://ostatic.com/blog/the-unlicense-a-license-for-no-license). OStatic. Archived from the original (http://ostatic.com/blog/the-unlicense-a-license-for-no-license) on January 22, 2017.

4. "Unlicense Yourself: Set Your Code Free" (http://unlicense.org). Retrieved February 28, 2017.

5. Balter, Ben (2015-03-09). "Open source license usage on GitHub.com" (https://github.com/blog/1964-license-usage-on-github-com). github.com. Retrieved 2015-11-21. "1 MIT 44.69%, 2 Other 15.68%, 3 GPLv2 12.96%, 4 Apache 11.19%, 5 GPLv3 8.88%, 6 BSD 3-clause 4.53%, 7 Unlicense 1.87%, 8 BSD 2-clause 1.70%, 9 LGPLv3 1.30%, 10 AGPLv3 1.05% (30 million × 2% × 17% = 102k)"

6. Arto Bendiken (January 1, 2010). "Set Your Code Free" (http://ar.to/2010/01/set-your-code-free). Retrieved February 10, 2017. "anybody affixing a licensing statement to open-source software is guilty of either magical thinking or of having an intention to follow up on the implied threat"

7. Arto Bendiken (January 23, 2010). "Dissecting the Unlicense: Software Freedom in Four Clauses and a Link" (http://ar.to/2010/01/dissecting-the-unlicense). Retrieved February 10, 2017.

8. Arto Bendiken (December 19, 2010). "Licensed, License-Free, and Unlicensed Code" (http://ar.to/2010/12/licensing-and-unlicensing). Retrieved February 10, 2017.

9. Arto Bendiken (January 1, 2011). "The Unlicense: The First Year in Review" (http://ar.to/2011/01/unlicense-1st-year). Retrieved February 10, 2017.

10. Moen, Rick (January 3, 2012). "[License-review] OSI, legal conditions outside the "four corners" of the license, and PD/CC 0 [was Re: Can OSI specify that public domain is open source?]" (https://web.archive.org/web/20170301020915/https://lists.opensource.org/pipermail/license-review/2012-January/001386.html). Open Source Initiative. Archived from the original (https://lists.opensource.org/pipermail/license-review/2012-January/001386.html) on March 1, 2017. Retrieved February 10, 2017.

11. Jaeckel, Steffen (March 28, 2020). "[License-review] Request for legacy approval: The Unlicense" (https://web.archive.org/web/20200908143823/http://lists.opensource.org/pipermail/license-review_lists.opensource.org/2020-March/004795.html). Archived from the original (http://lists.opensource.org/pipermail/license-review_lists.opensource.org/2020-March/004795.html) on September 8, 2020.

12. "Licensing/Unlicense" (https://fedoraproject.org/wiki/Licensing/Unlicense). Fedora Project. August 14, 2014. Retrieved February 28, 2017. "Fedora recommends use of CC-0 over this license, because it is a more comprehensive legal text around this tricky issue. It is also noteworthy that some MIT variant licenses which contain the right to "sublicense" are closer to a true Public Domain declaration than the one in the "Unlicense" text."

13. "Open Source Patching" (https://opensource.google/docs/patching/). Retrieved 2020-09-29.

14. Mike Linksvayer (December 17, 2010). "Conversation" (https://web.archive.org/web/201108 16083109/https://identi.ca/conversation/59986314). Identi.ca. Archived from the original (htt p://identi.ca/conversation/59986314) on August 16, 2011. Retrieved February 28, 2017. "@bendiken surely there's a better name than copyfree, but I like the movement and look fwd to your roundup."

15. Arto Bendiken (December 18, 2010). "CC0 and the Unlicense" (https://groups.google.com/fo rum/#!topic/unlicense/an9PHJ0NGxA). Google Groups. Retrieved February 28, 2017. "In case it's of interest, I'm engaged in an ongoing Identi.ca conversation with Mike Linksvayer, the vice president of Creative Commons [...] In short, the folks at Creative Commons are aware of the Unlicense initiative, and apparently supportive of it."

16. Val Markovic (Valloric) (July 6, 2014). "Use a working license instead of UNLICENSE" (http s://github.com/docopt/docopt.rs/issues/1). GitHub. Retrieved February 9, 2017.

17. cgt (May 3, 2012). "What is wrong with the Unlicense?" (https://softwareengineering.stackex change.com/questions/147111/what-is-wrong-with-the-unlicense). Software Engineering Stack Exchange. Retrieved February 10, 2017.

18. "youtube-dl GitHub page" (https://github.com/rg3/youtube-dl/blob/master/LICENSE). *GitHub*. Retrieved 2 October 2016.

19. Mika Tuomi (August 1, 2013). "SecondReality/UNLICENSE at master · mtuomi/SecondReality" (https://github.com/mtuomi/SecondReality/blob/master/UNLICENS E). GitHub. Retrieved February 28, 2017.

20. GloomAmiga (https://github.com/earok/GloomAmiga) on GitHub - Source code of Gloom released in May 2017

External links

- Official website (http://unlicense.org/)
- Official mailing list (https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/unlicense)