The Software Standoff
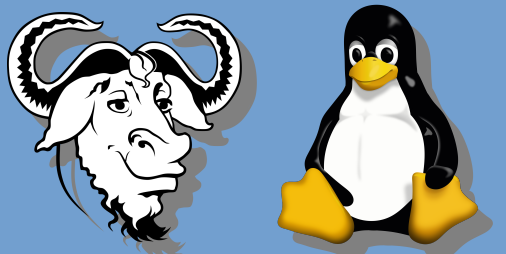
A computer is like air conditioning – it becomes useless when you open Windows

— Linus Torvalds —

By Tomaz GDA

Aim Of The Project

The objective of my essay is to illustrate the ethical concerns surrounding the software we commonly use. It also discusses how we can improve the education system by adopting a new methodology where we encourage free rather than proprietary software.

As well as this, it delves into other aspects of computing and the history of software. A brief table of contents can be found bellow.

[Section 1]

An explanation of what computers are – binary, logic gates, programs.

[Section 2]

History of Windows, Unix and MacOS

[Section 3]

History of GNU/Linux

[Section 4]

Definitions of proprietary, open source and free software + Ideology of the free software movement.

[Section 5]

How sections one through four relate to education – why we should encourage the use of free software.

[Literature Review]

Profiles on those who's knowledge in part formed my beliefs – the beliefs that the essay reflects.

[Conclusion]

A summary of all previous sections, reiterating the purpose of the essay.

[Wikipedia]

An explanation of why Wikipedia is a great source and shouldn't be frowned upon by institutions.

Introduction

Simply put, I chose this topic because I care about. I spend a good proportion of my school day, be it during a break or in a lesson, staring in front of a computer running software that disgusts me.

Not only should it be the choice of the individual what software they use, no one standard of software should be forced onto people as well. It would be ludicrous for an institution to force its pupils or employees to eat only ham and cheese bagels. The same logic applies for software; societies idea of liberties surrounding technology just hasn't caught up yet.

From primary school, we are indoctrinated to use humanities most substantial tool a certain way. We are taught one way of life and it becomes near impossible for us to seek alternatives later on.

Method

Under the section 'Sources' I list the resources I used for my studies in the order I came across them. Although this not include everything I went through, there are quite a lot of sources.

This essay, differentiating itself from the norm, is extremely opinionated. It discusses ethics after all which isn't representable by a simple cause and effect equation: the effects of x on y.
For this reason, a lot of the information contained within the writing is a reflection of the opinions of those I learn from.

The whole literature review is designated to cover those who I have learned from, helping me to produce my essay.

My essay is the output of dozens of hours of research a lot of which did not make its way into the final essay but rather served to improve my own understanding of some of the topics covered. Going into this, I doubted my ability to make the process of writing entertaining but I can confidently say that, coming out of it, it was an extremely beneficial and enjoyable experience .

Contributors

Here is a list of software that was used to produce both this poster and the essay.

Atom

Atom is, as mentioned under Process Of Development, a feature-packed text editor. It is, along with every other program on this list, open source

Firefox

Firefox is a web browser with strong privacy protection policies that cares about its users.

LibreOffice

LibreOffice is a collection of programs such as Writer and Impress used for a variety of applications including making text documents, posters and spreadsheets.

GitHub

GitHub is a website for hosting Git repositories It can be used for hosting websites, collaborating on projects as well as other applications.

GNU

GNU, a recursive acronym for GNU's not UNIX, is a collection of programs that are present in many modern day operating systems. In forms the majority of GNU/Linux systems, containing nearly everything but the Linux kernel.

Process Of Development

As a sort of extension to method, this section will detail how I produced my essay as well as the website that hosts it and this poster.

I wrote the essay directly in HTML using Atom – a massively customization text editor. The left-side image displays the Atom's GUI and a preview of the website on Mozilla Firefox. The essay is comprised of many separate files within my local ignite-essay folder, the contents of which can be easily 'pushed' (uploaded) to GitHub.

GitHub is a hosting service for Git (created by Linus Torvalds) repositories that allows for collaboration on open-source projects amongst other functions. One of those functions is the ability to host a website on GitHub's servers, where the website URL is provided to you. From there the process was simple: purchase a domain and assign that domain to the essay's GitHub repository.

This poster was created using LibreOffice Impress (showed on the right-side image), an open source presentation program packaged with many GNU/Linux distributions. Though my use of LibreOffice is minimal as I produce most work with text editors, it is a feature full and graphically pleasing program. In the few times I've been forced to use the most widespread proprietary equivalent – Microsoft PowerPoint – I have found PowerPoint's interface intuitive and its features lacklustre

As one last note, all work for this project was made on a system running a distribution of GNU/Linux.

To the right is a detailed graphical representation of a timeline of UNIX descendants. It begins with an "unnamed PDP-7 operating system" – PDP-7 referring to the microcomputer. This was the microcomputer used by Bell Labs to first develop UNIX.

Continuing straight down, the graph shows version 5 to 6 of UNIX. The university of California of Berkeley received a copy of UNIX 5 which they altered creating BSD (Berkshire Software Distribution).