

Software Philosophy

Open vs. Closed Source Software

Software consists of instructions which tell a computer what to do. These instructions have a human-readable form called **source code**, which is written by, and readable to, people. To make it useable to a computer, source code is **compiled** into **binary** (1s and 0s) which is very hard for humans to read. **Closed source** (proprietary) software are programs you generally pay to own and use: the source code is secret, and you cannot change how the program works. **Open source** (or FOSS) software are programs you can own and use for free: the source code is willingly shared, so anyone can change and improve the software. Big open source software projects, like Linux, are built by thousands of volunteers collaborating from around the world...it's more like a bazaar than a cathedral.

Sometimes proprietary software is best (it may have more features or be more polished) and sometimes open source software is best (it is certainly more free and may be more efficient, stable and secure). Let's look at some examples of open vs proprietary...



Winner: Open

Firefox has a long history of championing a fair, open, useable web. It has introduced innovative features, is fast, extensible and stable, and runs on almost all platforms and systems. Internet Explorer has been slow to change, is not standards compliant, only runs on Windows and is painfully slow to operate.



Draw

Mac OSX is the sleekest, most polished desktop operating system available today. It has a range of great apps, and is flexible, powerful and stable. Linux is the server operating system of choice: free, stable, efficient, flexible and scalable, it powers the likes of Google, Facebook and Twitter.



Winner: Proprietary

Whilst Libre Office provides a great free alternative to Microsoft Office. it cannot compete with the millions of dollars spent on features and interface by Microsoft. A nod in favour of Libre Office, however, is the fact that it uses document standards that are open and free, allowing for greater choice.



The Free Software movement, which later became known as Open Source, was started by Richard Stallman (RMS), an MIT researcher who has devoted his life to building open source software and licenses (such as the GNU GPL), and educating the world about the importance of free, open source software.



"Free as in speech, not free as in beer. - RMS"

