Open Source Alternatives

All the software on this page runs on Windows, Mac, and Linux

Web browser - Firefox Web Browser
www.getfirefox.com

Office Suite - OpenOffice.org
www.openoffice.org

Media player - VLC Media Player
www.videolan.org

Chat clients - Pidgin (previously called GAIM)
(Supports MSN, AIM, IRC, Yahoo!, Jabber, GTalk)
www.pidgin.im

Audio Editor- Audacity
http://audacity.sourceforge.net

Graphics - GNU Image Manipulation Program
(GIMP) *www.gimp.org*

For more suggestions, check out Open Source as Alternative at www.osalt.com

If you would like to try a completely open source Operating system, have a look at Ubuntu Linux at www.canonical.com

Open Source, Free-as-in-Speech, and Free-as-in-Beer

Edinburgh Linux Users Group
www.edlug.org.uk

What is Open Source?

Suppose you have a program written by a company that keeps their code proprietary - only they can see the code and only they can change it. If a user comes along and finds a problem, that user will need to notify the company that there is a problem and the company will then have to have one of their programmers go through the code and fix it.

Open source means that anyone can see and change the program - if a user comes along and finds a problem in the code, that same user can fix it immediately or can tell the community of people who are working on the code that they should look into the problem.

Why should I use open source software?

-More people to make improvements

Because the software is free from the control of one company, it can be used, changed, and improved-upon by any individual, group, or company. With so many different people looking at the code, there are many more eyes looking for problems and solving them. Bugs found in open source software tend to get found and fixed faster.

-Fewer viruses

Open source operating systems such as Ubuntu Linux get fewer viruses than Windows and Mac operating systems. This is partially due to their smaller market share - those who create viruses will target the larger market so they can infect the most computers. Linux is also more resistent to viruses because of the self-contained nature of each program, keeping a virus from infecting the entire computer even if it is able to sneak into one program. When a virus is discovered in an open-source program, it would be quickly fixed by the many people working on the code for that program.

- Open Source alternatives for all programs

There should be an open source version of just about any tool you use on the computer (see the back page for a list of useful open source programs available). These won't always be exactly the same as the proprietary versions but there's always a tool suitable for a job.

What is the difference between Free-as-in-Speech and Free-as-in-Beer?

Free-as-in-beer means that something is `gratis'. When you use a program or application such as Skype, MSN messenger, or GoogleMail, you are using free-as-in-beer software. It costs you nothing to use but you cannot change it and you are not permitted to redistribute it yourself.

Free-as-in-speech is another way of describing `freedom'. With a program that is free-as-in-speech, a user would be free to use it as they please, free to share it with other users, and free to change it as they please.

What is GNU-Linux?

The name 'Linux' or 'GNU-Linux' applies to many different open source, free-as-in-speech, and free-as-in-beer operating systems that you can use instead of Mac's OSX or Windows XP, Vista or Windows7.

Different versions of Linux come with different open source programs, have different interfaces, and serve many different uses, but each distribution (distro) prides itself on being free-as-in-speech - that any user or group of users can change any and all of the code as they wish. Some distros may even require that if you change things you must again redistribute your changes to better help others who may wish to use your changes.

Beginners may be interested in trying Ubuntu Linux which can be run off of a CD to try it out without needing to install it on your computer.