Tech Talk Tuesdays #1: Intro

Topics

- Free & Open source
- GNU+Linux
- De-googling
- Alternative platforms

FREE SOFTWARE

What does it mean?

- Not free as in price
- Free as in Freedom

Free vs Proprietary

- Free: promotes freedom
- Proprietary: restricts freedom

"Free software is computer software distributed under terms that allow users to run the software for any purpose as well as to study, change, and distribute it and any adapted versions. Free software is a matter of liberty, not price; all users are legally free to do what they want with their copies of a free software regardless of how much is paid to obtain the program. Computer programs are deemed"free" if they give end-users ultimate control over the software and, subsequently, over their devices."

"Proprietary software, also known as non-free software or closed-source software, is computer software for which the software's publisher or another person reserves some licensing rights to use, modify, share modifications, or share the software."

OPEN SOURCE

What is it?

- Open: visible and readable code
- Closed: hidden code

Why is it important?

- Auditing: since the code is public, it can be reviewed to check no malicious code is added.
- Better development: new features and errors can be fixed by anyone and the code can be merged with the original project, by the developers.
- Security and bug-fixing: bugs and security vulnerabilities can be reported by anyone and quickly fixed.
- FOSS can be forked: if the project dies or if it adds some unwanted feature, on can remove those features and republish the project.

PITFALLS

Software that claims to be open source but isn't:

- Google Chrome
- Microsoft Edge
- Android
- Telegram

Nowadays, the term "*open source*" is equated with "good". Therefore, **a lot of projects claim to be open source but aren't**. Some have a component that is open, but add more closed-source code on top.

That is the case of Google Chrome or Microsoft Edge, which are based on Google's open source web browser Chromium, but add closed-source code on top of it.

Another example are "Android phones", as most of them have an operating system based on the Android Open Source Project (AOSP), but that is later modified by the phone's vendor.

Also, Telegram is a good example of sketchy advertising as open source, as their app is open source, but the rest of the service isn't. That means that the program on your phone has visible code, but all their server software doesn't, so no one knows what they do on Telegram's side.

DESKTOP OPERATING SYSTEMS

GNU+Linux vs **MacOS/Windows**

What do they offer? In a nutshell. . .

- Windows: Easy, "just works" spyware
- MacOS: "beautiful" walled garden. Also spyware
- GNU+Linux: Freedom of choice

A GNU+Linux-based operating system (there are other non-GNU+Linux-based OSs too) gives you the freedom to remove and change any piece of the OS that you don't like. You can even tailor your OS to your own needs. This doesn't happen with Windows and MacOS, which take the control off of the user's hands.

Too many choices?

There are thousands of GNU+Linux-based OSs. This is good because there is probably an OS out there for any kind of need. However, this can make choosing the "right one", a bit harder for beginners.

Give new life to your ageing PC

Thanks to this diversity of OSs, you can find several distributions (the term for GNU+Linux OSs) for ageing PCs. With the right software, your ageing computer can become snappy again.

Testing out a distribution

One can test out most GNU+Linux distributions in a low commitment way, as most offer live images. Burning an image to a USB stick is quite simple. Then one can boot into that Live USB and test out the OS, without having to install it. Once you're done with testing, you reboot the computer, take out the USB stick and you can go back to your everyday use, because nothing was changed.

DE-GOOGLE

- **What is it?** It is a movement that encourages to stop using Google products.
- **Why should you de-google?** Google uses your data to profile you and sells it to advertisers. Google makes **you** the product.
- **How can you do it?** There are several alternatives to Google's products (see Alternative Platforms). De-googling your phone, however, is a bit more difficult to do by oneself, if one is not tech-savvy. Some phones are easier, others harder, but there is always the risk of damaging the phone if done incorrectly.

If you want to de-google your phone or would like to acquire a new one that is already de-googled, contact Libre (Liberate Your Tech) on Element or through the website *liberateyourtech.com*.

ALTERNATIVE PLATFORMS

Common benefits:

- Decentralised
- Self-hosted
- Censorship resistant

Alternative platforms are often decentralised, which means there is not a single point of failure. If Facebook's service goes down, every user will not be able to access the service. On the other hand, if a server in a decentralised network stops working, users can create accounts or move to other servers and continue using the service. Decentralised services are more **resilient**.

Also, most FOSS alternative platforms offer the possibility to host your own server. This means that you can have your own server for your friends and family and no one can delete your account or lock you out of the service for having the wrong opinions.

These two aspects make some of these alternative platforms **censorship resistant**.

Resources

Find alternative FOSS here:

- privacytools.io
- prism-break.org
- degoogle.jmoore.dev