

Free software isn't freeware: why Linux and FOSS have a higher standard

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Microsoft's recent survey proclaimed nearly half the population believe it is ok to use pirated software for personal use. This diminishes the argument by Linux advocates that you can use their operating system without any cost. Yet, you can't confuse free as in cost with free as in freedom. Here's what FOSS really means.

The survey was commissioned by Microsoft Australia and determined 45% of Australians believed software piracy was acceptable for their own use. It would be reasonable to think these viewpoints are shared across the world in similar numbers.

Microsoft has its own set of problems to deal with as a result of the survey findings. They don't want their software to be used by those who have not paid for it. Can they in good conscience withhold security updates from unlicensed users? Do they increase the price thus making licensed users be unfairly taxed to cover the lost revenue? There is no end of ramifications that the Redmond giant will be considering.

On the other side of the fence, those of us who work to advocate the use of free and open source software, such as the alternate operating system Linux, find that one argument in our arsenal is greatly weakened.

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