

Without Free Software, Open Source Would Lose its Meaning

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I'm a big fan of Matt Asay's writings about free software. He combines a keen analytical intelligence with that rare thing: long-term hands-on experience in the world of open source business. But even though I generally look forward to reading his posts, I have been rather dreading the appearance of one that I knew, one day, he would write...because it would be wrong. And now he has written it, with the self-explanatory headline: "Free software is dead. Long live open source."

Matt states in his first paragraph what the key issue is:

One of the most inspiring things I've witnessed in my 10-plus years in open source is its gradual embrace of pragmatism. By "pragmatism" I don't mean "capitulation," whereby open source comes to look more like the proprietary world it has sought to displace. Rather, I would suggest that the more open source has gone mainstream the more it has learned to make compromises, compromises that make it stronger, not weaker.

Open source exists because of a refusal to compromise by the creators of free software programs. The "pragmatism" that Matt lauds is only an option for open source because the people who did all the hard work in creating free software refused to compromise initially.

[rest here](#) [2]

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