

What Is FREE SOFTWARE Magazine?

FREE SOFTWARE magazine (“FSM” for short) is a free (the free in “freedom”) monthly periodical devoted to the global free software community. It is published in online electronic form on the world wide web (<http://www.rons.net.cn>) and in printed paper copies by RON’s Datacom Co., Ltd., with the direct support of **Free Software Foundation**, and **FSF, China Academy**. We invite you to read and contribute.

The basic goal of the FREE SOFTWARE magazine is to be the voice of the Free Software community, the voice of people concerned about their freedom, of developers creating a world of software that is fair to everyone. We value companies as developers and users of free software, but we value individuals above companies.

This brings the FREE SOFTWARE magazine closer to the spirit of the Free Software movement than any other magazine. Around the world there are dozens of magazines dedicated to the GNU/Linux operating system (although they often don’t call it that). The FREE SOFTWARE magazine is not one of them. If a program is non-free but runs on GNU/Linux, that is not enough to gain a place for it in the FREE SOFTWARE magazine; when companies promote solutions that include Free Software and non-free software, the FREE SOFTWARE magazine will decline to participate. On the other hand, free software other than GNU/Linux is welcome. This is because we aim for something beyond the popularity of any specific free software package or system. **We’re aiming to spread freedom.**

What Is Free Software?

In the term “free software”, the word “free” refers to freedom, not price. Free software means users have these freedoms:

- The freedom to run the program, for any purpose.
- The freedom to study the program, and modify it to suit their needs. In practice, access to the source code is a precondition for this freedom.
- The freedom to redistribute copies, either for a fee or gratis.
- The freedom to distribute modified versions of the software, and thus contribute to the community.

Please read <http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-sw.html> for more details.

What Is Copyleft?

One way of giving users these freedoms is to put the program source code in the public domain. However, this allows modified versions to be non-free; the users can lose their freedom if non-free versions displace the original free version.

“Copyleft” free software licenses are designed to give users the essential freedoms, but also to require all modified and extended versions to be equally free. This actively defends the users’ freedom and eliminates the danger that freedom will be lost in future versions of the program. The primary example of a copyleft license for software is the **GNU General Public License (GNU GPL, for short)**. For more information about free software licenses, see <http://www.gnu.org/licenses/>.

The Free Software Movement was launched in 1984 along with the development of the GNU operating system. We believe that you are entitled to these freedoms as a matter of right, and nobody should ever take them away from you.

What Is “Open Source”?

In the 1990s, as some free software packages and the GNU/Linux system became popular, some users and developers chose free software for its practical advantages but did not agree with the Free Software Movement’s values. In 1998 they began using the term “open source”, as a way of talking about free software without making people aware of the Free Software Movement and its views. The Open Source Movement cites only practical advantages in being able to modify and redistribute software; they studiously avoid calling this an ethical imperative. They gave their term a definition similar to the definition of “free software” but not identical. Most open source programs are free software, but some are not.

Because the term “open source” is very much associated with the views and the values of the Open Source Movement, we do not use it. We remain, as we have been since 1984, the Free Software Movement.

See <http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/free-software-for-freedom.html> for more explanation about the difference between free software and open source.

What Is GNU?

GNU is a Unix-compatible operating system that consists entirely of free software (The name “GNU” stands for “**GNU’s Not Unix**”, and is pronounced “g-noo”). Development of GNU began in January 1984. A Unix-like operating system includes a kernel, libraries, editors, compilers, mail software, and many other utilities and tools. The GNU system is source-compatible with Unix, meaning that program source code written to run on Unix should also run on GNU. See <http://www.gnu.org/gnu/> for more information.

What Is Linux?

Linux is a kernel which has originally been developed by Linus Torvalds in 1991. The kernel is the component of an operating system that is responsible for running other programs and keeping them separate, for reading and writing disk files, for low-level network communication, and some other tasks. Linux is free, just as GNU software is, and it provides the same functionality as the kernel of a proprietary Unix system. The Linux kernel is now developed collaboratively by a huge community of developers.

What Is GNU/Linux?

GNU/Linux is the combination of Linux and the GNU system, modified to work together smoothly. Many people call this combination “Linux”, but that is a misnomer, since the system is basically GNU with Linux added. The misnomer leads regularly to confusion about the history and nature of the system. See <http://www.gnu.org/gnu/linux-and-gnu.html> for more explanation. So, when you see “Linux” in FSM, it means the kernel; when you see ‘GNU/Linux’, that means the whole system.

Today’s free software ranges from free operating systems such as GNU/Linux, to office suites, databases, electronic publishing, network management, and scientific research tools. We believe more and more free software will be available in the future. **FREE SOFTWARE magazine covers all kinds of free software that we think is noteworthy for our community.**

— FSM

