

RMS COLUMN

Preface for the First Issue

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Welcome to **FREE SOFTWARE** magazine — the first magazine dedicated to specifically to free software. Free software is a convenient and powerful way to use a computer, but it is more than that. Free software is the the basis for a community of freedom that you can join.

With free software, you have freedom to change software when you wish, as you wish. You can ask a friend to change it for you, or hire a company to change it for you. With free software, you have the freedom to share with your neighbors, and your neighbors have the freedom to share with you.

This community of freedom is the reason that we founded the Free Software Movement. Only free software respects your freedom; to live and work in a community of freedom and cooperation, we needed free software. So we wrote free software.

In this and future issues of FREE SOFTWARE magazine, you will learn:

- How to obtain free software and share it with your neighbor, both legally and practically. (If you use a typical proprietary software product, you could only share it illegally.)
- How to change free software for yourself. (If you use a typical proprietary software product, you are prevented from changing it.)
- How to find a company that you can hire to make changes for you.
- How to write free software better, using the available free software tools.
- How to find other people who share your interests in using and changing free software.
- Why a free and cooperative community generates software that becomes more reliable, efficient, and secure.
- Which companies and laws threaten our community's freedom, and how you can help defend our community from these threats.
- How free software can empower you.

Today the free software community is large. Our movement has had substantial success, and we hope to have more. But success for free software does not mean “world domination”, as boosters of the kernel, Linux, like to put it. **Success for free software is world liberation!**

History We started with a free operating system, because you can't do anything with your computer without an operating system. We started developing the GNU system in 1984; in 1991, with the GNU system almost finished, the last missing crucial piece of the system was developed: the kernel, Linux. When GNU and Linux were combined to form the GNU/Linux system, it became possible, for the first time since the hobbyist microcomputers of the 1970s, to use a computer and keep your freedom.

But GNU/Linux is a Unix-like operating system — a system that a wizard could love, but ordinary users did not like. To carry freedom to non-wizards, we had to make GNU/Linux easy to use. We needed to provide a desktop with graphical interfaces.

The need for this was evident long before. The first GNU project to develop a graphical desktop was started in 1990, but it did not take off. GNOME, started in 1997, did take off. GNOME also provoked the freeing of a crucial library needed by the KDE desktop, so that it too became fully free. So we are on the threshold of an age where a user-friendly free operating system can satisfy all kinds of computer users.