

What do you mean you can't Skype?!

Open World Forum
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Free Software Foundation

October 3, 2013



Nice to meet you

I've been the Executive Director just since 2011, but I've been with the Free Software Foundation since 2003.

The FSF was founded as a nonprofit organization in 1985 to fight for the freedoms of computer users worldwide, and to sponsor the GNU Project, which has a goal of making a fully free operating system.



Happy Birthday, GNU!



Our goal

At the FSF and in the GNU Project, we want **all** computer users to be able to do **everything** they need to do on **any** computer, using **only** free software. We have been working toward this goal since it was announced in 1983.



Our organization

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- We also encourage (and often require) everyone we work with to use only free software, free formats, and free fonts.



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We are often asked to use Skype for this.



“What do you mean you can't Skype?!”

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Well, we *could*, but we won't.



What do you mean you can't Skype?!

Well, we *could*, but we won't.
Skype is not free software.



“Wait, what do you mean Skype isn't free software? You can download it for free!”

Four Freedoms

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- **Freedom 2:** The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neighbor.
- **Freedom 3:** The freedom to distribute copies of your modified versions to others. By doing this you can give the whole community a chance to benefit from your changes.



Licenses and freedom

There are several ways software can be proprietary – copyright license, EULA contract, software patents, etc. As the GNU General Public License begins:

The licenses for most software and other practical works are designed to take away your freedom to share and change the works. By contrast, the GNU General Public License is intended to guarantee your freedom to share and change all versions of a program—to make sure it remains free software for all its users.



Skype's license makes it not free software: Freedom 0

While you can download the program without charge, Skype denies you the freedom to run the program for any purpose.

4.2 Restrictions. You may not and you agree not to . . . use the Software or cause the Software (or any part of it) to be used within or to provide commercial products or services to third parties.

(License quotes are from <http://www.skype.com/en/legal/tou/>.)



Skype is not free software: Freedom 1

Skype denies you the freedom to read and modify the program's source code.

You may not and you agree not to . . . undertake, cause, permit or authorise the modification, creation of derivative works or improvements, translation, reverse engineering, decompiling, disassembling, decryption, emulation, hacking, discovery or attempted discovery of the source code or protocols of the Software or any part or features thereof



Skype is not free software: Freedom 2 and 3

Skype denies you the freedom to share modified or unmodified copies of the program.

You may not and you agree not to . . . sub-license, sell, assign, rent, lease, export, import, distribute or transfer or otherwise grant rights to any third party in the Software;



Why are you picking on Skype?



Why are you picking on Skype?

Because it's owned by Microsoft?



Why are you picking on Skype?

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No.



Stallman on Skype

When Microsoft bought Skype, RMS said:

The Skype client program is nonfree software: it gives its owner power over its users. Presently it will give the same power to a different company. The identity of the master is just a detail, because freedom means not having a master.



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That's why.



But also . . .

The essence of the free software movement is collaboration and communication. Many other kinds of movements – in journalism, in culture, in political decisionmaking – are focusing on the lessons learned from the incredible grassroots, broad-based collaboration that happens in free software development and advocacy.



Our best thing is becoming our worst

Skype is software to do a very important and sensitive job – communication. If we don't control the infrastructure we use to do our communication and collaboration within this movement, then what do we control? What are we doing to that example I just mentioned? We are showing that we need proprietary software in order to conduct the most fundamental business of our movement.



...and it's going to come back and bite us

Much like PayPal can and does shut down payments for politically controversial groups, Skype can shut down communications. We should not be dependent on them.



Not just hypothetical

We should never wait for proprietary software owners to abuse us before switching to free software, but in fact Skype has already demonstrated such abuses.

- Skype gave personal info about a WikiLeaks supporter to another company with no legal obligation to do so:

`http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2012/11/09/skype_gave_data_on_a_teen_wikileaks_supporter_to_a_private_company_without.html`



Not just hypothetical

- Skype messages are not encrypted, and Microsoft can read them:
[http://arstechnica.com/security/2013/05/
think-your-skype-messages-get-end-to-end-encryption-think](http://arstechnica.com/security/2013/05/think-your-skype-messages-get-end-to-end-encryption-think)



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- ...and Microsoft does read them: <http://fossforce.com/2013/05/microsoft-snoops-in-skype-dissed-by-hp-more/>



Recap

When you use Skype, you:

- Help create a norm that Skype usage – and proprietary software usage in general – is okay.



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Recap

When you use Skype, you:

- Help create a norm that Skype usage – and proprietary software usage in general – is okay.
- Put your communications and the communications of your organization at the mercy of a company that does not have your interests in mind, and that has been found to repeatedly betray its users.
- Contaminate one of the shining values of the free software movement – not just open communication but *free* communication.



It's not worth it

Don't be deceived by the price. Skype is not actually free. There *are* costs to using Skype. Those costs include our own individual freedom, the freedom of others, the autonomy of our organizations, and our privacy.



It's not worth it

Temporary gains in efficiency in communication are simply not worth these costs, or the cost of undermining the ethical commitment to free software.



It's not just Skype

Of course, it's only an example. Everything I've said can also be said about Google Hangouts, or FaceTime, or any other proprietary software often used in the course of free software development.



So how do we communicate?

At the FSF, we don't use Skype. We use the free software phone server Asterisk, and SIP – a standard protocol spoken by many clients for doing voice and video communication.



What free software is there?

There are many programs, but some of the main ones we are following right now are:

- Mumble (voice)
- Jitsi (voice and video)
- WebRTC (voice and video)
- GNU Telephony (voice and video)
- Pidgin with XMPP/Jabber (instant messaging)
- Asterisk



But I need Skype!

You probably don't **need** it. And if you are using Skype, that part of what you are doing is working against the free software movement. You may be doing a lot of other things to help free software (thank you!), but I cannot sugarcoat the fact that this one thing is hurting us (and you!).

If you don't want to stop using it, ask yourself what your blocking issues are, and then support free projects working to address those issues.



We're hiring

If you want to help us make a difference in this area, and others, we are hiring for a GNU/Linux systems administrator.

<http://www.fsf.org/news/>

`fsf-seeks-full-time-senior-gnu-linux-sysadmin`

I'm looking for people for whom knowing they are helping humanity is as important as money. I view this as a way of enabling dedicated people to devote their full energies to working on GNU by sparing them the need to make a living in another way.



Support Freedom and GNU

Our work is funded primarily by grassroots contributions from thousands of individual members.

- Replacing Skype is an FSF High Priority Project:
fsf.org/campaigns/priority-projects
- Join the FSF at <http://www.fsf.org/join> (use referrer #8096 if you like me). Or donate what you can at <https://donate.fsf.org>.



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- Support specific free software projects, especially in this area.
- Stay informed by subscribing to our *Free Software Supporter* newsletter at <http://www.fsf.org/fss>. It's also available in Spanish.



Make it happen

The theme of this event is “Make it happen!”
It’s an excellent theme. We need to make free software happen. But we also need its corollary.



Make it **stop**.

Stopping proprietary software

Change happens through resistance as well as creation. “Living free in a nonfree world” means helping to develop free solutions, but it also means saying no to some tempting things when those solutions don’t yet exist.



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Change happens through resistance as well as creation. “Living free in a nonfree world” means helping to develop free solutions, but it also means saying no to some tempting things when those solutions don’t yet exist. Next time someone asks you to Skype, or Hangout, or FaceTime, please say no. At least periodically *try* the free replacements, and report any bad experiences you may have.



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As the GPL says, “To protect your rights, we need to prevent others from denying you these rights or asking you to surrender the rights.”



And if you won't stop . . . we have ways.

