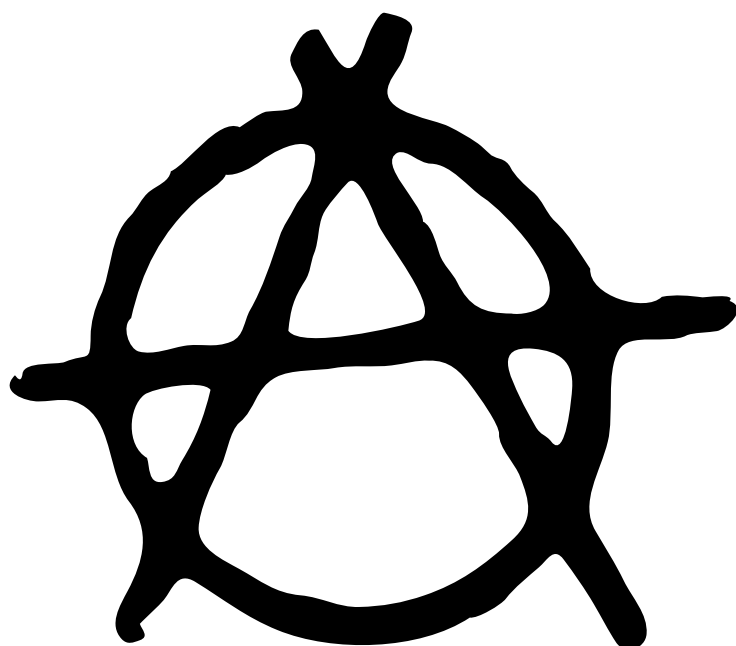


# The Open Source Revolution

**Part 1: Everything's changed.  
It's time to pick a side.**



**When you buy out of the box, you're stuck with what you've got. Your other alternative is customisation which can be expensive. Right?**

## **What is open source?**

**Simple answer:** An open source application is any software program that allows you to tinker under its hood.

**Slightly less-simple answer:** Programming code is basically a set of instructions that tells the computer what to do. Standard applications that you can purchase for your computer (such as Microsoft Office) will normally disallow you access to their code. If the code is inaccessible you are restricted by whatever features and tools have been supplied with the application.

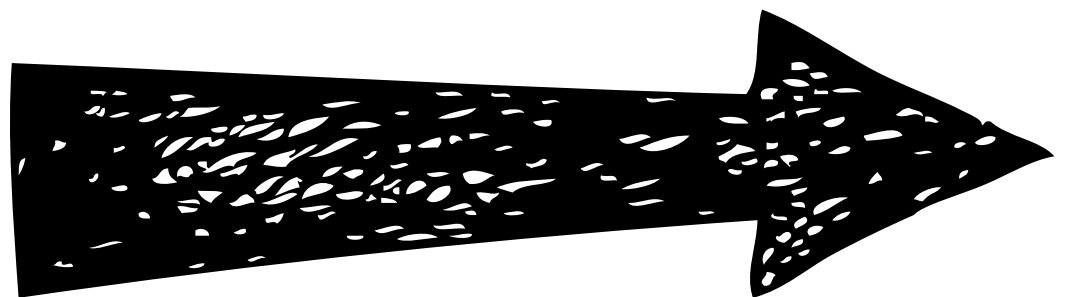
Open source applications work in the opposite way. They provide access to all of the programming code so that you can change the application to work the way you want it to. This means if there is a feature you don't like, or think is missing, you can access the code and make the relevant changes, creating a better and tailored application to fit your unique requirements.

# One business need. Two philosophies.

Previously, a business requiring a software solution had one main option – to find one company producing off-the-shelf business applications that provide an answer to the lowest common denominator of similar needs. Custom-built solutions are, of course, an alternative. But usually very costly.

Now? There's a revolution underway. It's called open source. The open source community provides businesses with a significant head start towards tailored solutions by allowing access (often at no cost to the business) to the source code of the most appropriate software. The idea is simple – take the software's source code and develop it according to your unique needs. In short, this means that custom-built software solutions can be created for a fraction of the cost of those provided under the proprietary software model. Open source solutions are driven entirely by need, rather than selecting the best on offer from a small handful of licensors.

# OPEN



# Why do organisations create open and closed source software?

The benefits of creating and selling closed source software are simple. The producer makes software that can be sold, and prohibit the buyers from both distributing it further, and from accessing the source code (the stuff that makes the software work). Any person or business breaking the seller/buyer agreement is subject to legal action.

The motivations for creating open source software are not as simple. In fact, there are endless reasons why a company, organisation, or single developer may want to distribute their intellectual property throughout the open source world. The reasons aren't always economic. Many organisations and individuals create open source software simply as a direct result of their passions for coding. This reason is often closely followed by wanting to give their assistance to those who don't want to rely on a single closed source provider to meet their needs. Sometimes, open source software is sponsored by a company to create competition in an environment that's otherwise monopolised by a particular company.

## Is it like stealing, without the consequences?

Open source software and its creators are covered by the GPL (General Public Licence), as well as many other licenses. This means that when using software published under a license such as the GPL, it can be used free of charge and distributed to any number of people (including companies), so long as the user doesn't claim that it's 'theirs'. Changes can be made to the source code (hence the name, 'open source') and the software can be passed or sold on, provided the modified source code is made available on the open source market, specifying which bits were altered. The person or organisation sold to is then free to redistribute (for free).

As with any software, complimentary applications and plug-ins can also be created to enhance the open source application. These peripheral applications are not subject to the GPL, and can be sold under a normal closed source license. This benefits a company by being able to work with open source software developers who build peripheral applications for a fraction of the cost of IT companies who 'own the whole lot.'

# Myth Buster

## **Open source software isn't reliable**

If open source software isn't reliable, then you can expect the world as we know it to end. Why? Because the Internet itself relies on one application called BIND. Yes indeed, BIND is an open source application.

You may not know it, but you rely on open source software every day in your normal business and personal activities. More than 60% of all websites are run on servers using an open source platform. More often than not, an email you write and send will ride on open source applications to reach its destination. It's fact – open source applications are all around us, and we rely on them without us even knowing.

## **There's no support for open source applications**

There are many companies set up to support open source software if you don't want to put your business at the mercy of the 'community.'

## **Big business wouldn't touch open source with a barge pole**

Wrong! Even Google believes in open source – the company even develops it and monetises it.

## **It will never take off**

It's already taken off. It's just that many large proprietary software companies prefer to keep the whole thing quiet and/or confusing.

## **It will loose steam**

It's actually still gathering momentum.





# The pros and cons

## Closed source software pros

- When purchasing closed source software, you get more than a disc. You'll get a document stating you've purchased something, and with it an expectation that it'll work in the way promised. If it doesn't work in that way, you can take legal action against the provider.
- Any software provider worth their salt will also provide at least some degree of service/support for the purchased application.

## Closed source software cons

- Software providers carry the never-ending burden of upgrading their products. This means they need to invest heavily in keeping up with, or ahead of, the industry. Naturally, these costs are passed onto the user.
- The majority of closed source software is pushed into the market long before it's ready. Many software companies view this practice (although they'll be unlikely to admit it) as crucial to the development/testing of the product. While premature software distribution can mean speedy testing, and therefore fast bug-fixing, it also means that early users can end up paying a harsh price for product development by way of serious compromises to the integrity of their IT.
- The most common method of fixing bugs is for the software producer to supply a patch. However, users are often pretty bad at installing patches – this means that they, and their company's systems, remain vulnerable even after a bug is found.
- Since closed source companies are the only organisations with the rights to build and develop their products, there are a small number of versions of commonly used software, especially in light of the number of computers in use today. This means that the warped writers of viruses can exploit computers by the thousands, damaging entire networks, and sometimes bringing businesses to a standstill.

## Open source pros

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- The source code of open software is available to be read by anyone. The code for very popular applications is therefore investigated and developed by more manpower than the world's largest corporate giants can afford to employ, and bugs are normally discovered by coders, rather than unfortunately stumbled upon by the poor end user.
- Open source software applications have a far better safety/security record than closed source. Because open source applications are normally created for use by the experienced people who write them, security is almost always more important than convenience.



## Open source cons

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- Since open source applications carry no warranty, there's nobody to sue if the software breaks. However unlikely that may be. That said, open source applications are typically safer than closed source - plus in the event of failure, fixes usually happen far more quickly than in closed source failures as there are usually more people working on the problem. However, there are companies who based their offerings on open source software who can be contracted to undertake development and support. This means you still get accountability, without the large cost.
- Some open source applications are difficult to use, unless they've been reworked by an open source developer (such as [elliottyoung](#)).

# Conclusion part 1

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Love it or hate it, fear or embrace it, open source software is gathering momentum within a changing world that has learned that there are alternatives to the same old models. Nowadays, we all use open source software, often without realising it.

The debate rages on, and the revolution has barely begun. Keep an eye out for part 2 of our discussion on [The Open Source Revolution](#), where we'll ask the question, where will open source take us over the next five years?

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