Bruce Perens, "Debian Free Software Guidelines"

Read the article at https://edtechbooks.org/-nTmo

Background

The Debian Free Software Guidelines (DFSG) are a set of guidelines that the Debian Project uses to determine whether the license used by a piece of software qualifies as a free software license. This distinction is critical because it determines whether a piece of software qualifies for inclusion in the Debian Project.

The idea of stating the project's "social contract with the free software community" was suggested by Ean Schuessler. This DFSG was drafted by Bruce Perens, refined by the other Debian developers during a month-long e-mail conference in June 1997, and then accepted as the publicly stated policy of the Debian Project.

Key Points

Debian Social Contract, which includes the DFSG, states:

- Debian will remain 100% Free Software – they will support users who develop and use non-free software on Debian, but won't make the system need it.
- The Debian Free Software Guidelines:
  - Free Redistribution – no restrictions, no royalties
  - Source code – must be distributed as well
  - Derived Works – must be allowed
  - Integrity of the Author's Source Code – license can restrict source code from being distributed when modified only if patch files are allowed. Derived files can be required to use a different name or number. (This is a grudging compromise).
  - No discriminations against persons or groups
  - No Discrimination against fields of endeavor (e.g. business, genetic research)
  - Distribution of license – must be able to use same license in distributions
  - License must not be specific to Debian – license must be free standing
  - License must not contaminate other software – must not restrict software that comes with it.
  - Example licenses – GPL, BSD, Artistic.
- They will give back to the free software community – new things will be licensed as free software. They will make the best system they can and improve their products.
- Won't hide problems – keep the whole but report public
- Priorities are users and free software – Won't stop them from using whatever software they want on Debian, but the system will remain high-quality and free.
- Programs that don't meet free software standards – There is a place for non-free software on Debian and they will provide an infrastructure for it.

Discussion Questions

1. What relationship does Debian have with open?

Additional Resources

Open Source Definition. (2014). Open Source Initiative. Retrieved from http://opensource.org/docs/osd

Debian Social Contract. (1997). Debian Social Contract, Version 1.0. Retrieved from https://edtechbooks.org/-NQxq