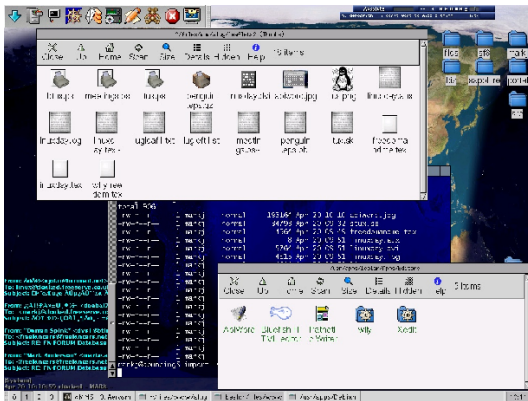# Why Freedom Matters

One of the most important features of a GNU/Linux system is the freedom of the software on it. When we talk about freedom, we aren't talking about price, although most of the software doesn't cost anything, but we are talking about your freedom to use and change the software as you wish.
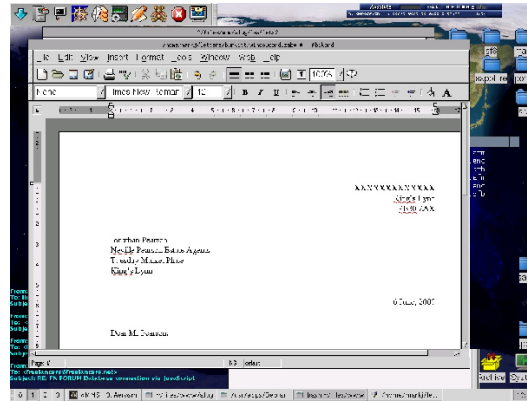
### The Four Freedoms

1. The freedom to run the program, for any purpose;

2. The freedom to study how the program works, and adapt it to your needs;

3. The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help other users;

4. The freedom to improve the program and release your improvements to the public, so that the whole community benefits;

We now have a huge library of software that gives you these four freedoms, including word processors, document publishing systems (such as the one that created this leaflet), financial software, web browsers, etc. But why should you care about these freedoms?



## For the home user...



Normally, you do not have any ownership of the software that you use. Instead, you are granted a "licence" to use it by the author or publisher in exchange for a fee. At any time, they may revoke your licence or refuse to sell you a new one. They also restrict the number of copies you may make and prevent you from changing the software to meet your needs. If you want to make it do a new task, all you can do is ask the author. If they refuse, you cannot do that task with that program and will have to find and learn a new program.
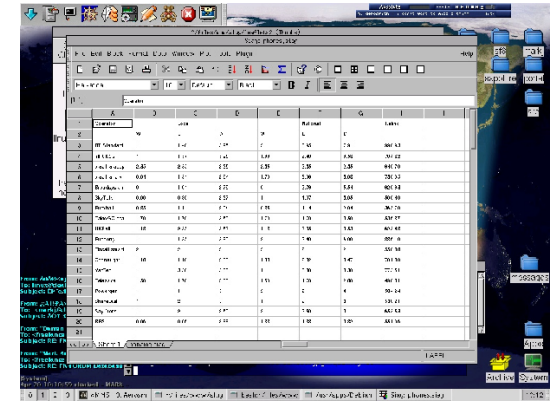
Free Software is different. For the home user, these freedoms give you a guarantee that you will always be allowed to run them, because the "termination clauses" found in most licences are not allowed. You can make as many copies as you want, totally legally – if your friend wants to use a program that you have, you can just give him a copy.

Also, you will always have the opportunity to change the software to meet your needs, either by doing it yourself, or finding a programmer to do it for you. If the original author doesn't want to do it, that's fine – you just find another way to obtain the programming "service" that you want.

## For the business



The benefits for businesses are similar to those for home users, but more so. Enforcing restrictive software licences is becoming a major hidden cost for UK companies, with larger corporations setting up departments just for this task. The Business Software Alliance (BSA) can use archaic laws to audit a company's software licences and breaches may bring large fines.

The alternative is to use Free Software, which has very permissive licences. No more will your company's essential computer files be held to ransom by another company that could withdraw support for your software and demand that you stop using it at any time. No more will you have to worry about staff taking a copy of a useful program to run on their home computer. You know that you will always be able to get new features that you need added, thanks to a free and fair market in software development.

## Find out more

The Anglian Linux User Group (ALUG) are holding information days at Syleham Village Hall, near Diss, on 19th May; and UEA Norwich on 9th June. Check the web site at www.alug.org.uk for more details and join the mailing list if you'd like to talk about fairer software for your computer.

The UK's Association For Free Software is online at www.affs.org.uk and welcomes new members and helpers.