What is Free/Libre/Open Source Software?

FLOSS is spreadsheets, games, word processors, graphics programmes, web browsers, email clients…
…and is legal, free and secure

Benefits of FLOSS

Who will you be working for and what do you want to be doing tomorrow?

Whatever your answers odds on you wouldn't want your choices or opportunities to be limited because a software vendor refuses to allow you access to modify or review the tools you need. FLOSS empowers you here. If you need to redistribute or modify a software tool or application you can go ahead and customise it to your needs. As long as you feed the benefits of your work back to the community you can modify and redistribute FLOSS as much as you wish.

Who do you want to share information with today and in the future?

FLOSS is built compatible and portable. Compatible, in that its built from a foundation of choice and designed to work in mixed environments. Portable, in that you can use one toolkit in a number of environments. This is very different to the closed world of propriety software, where applications are designed to lock you in to particular formats and platforms.

Examples of FLOSS

Open Office • a powerful office suite • http://www.openoffice.org/
The Gimp • Photo editing software and more • http://www.gimp.org/
Mplayer • MultiMedia Player • http://mp.dev.hu/homepage/
Mozilla • Modern fully featured web browser • http://www.mozilla.org/
GNU/Linux • Powerful Free Software Operating System • http://www.linux.org/

Where can you find out more?

You can start using FLOSS today. Download the **opencd** [http://www.theopencd.org/] and you'll get access to a load of quality FLOSS applications that you can run on Windows.

Download a copy of the **knoppix live** CD from [http://www.knoppix.org/] or the **dyne:bolic** CD from [http://www.dynebolic.org/]. These will allow you to try the Linux operating system from a bootable CD. They should work in most modern PCs and will not affect the hard disks or any existing operating system.
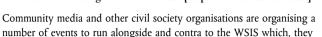
For more information on free and open source software see [http://www.gnu.org/] and [http://www.opensource.org/].

The end value of any software is limited by the amount of support that is available. As FLOSS is a community effort it has a wealth of web and email based support. There are also local self help user groups. You can contact **Slugbug** [http://www.slugbug.org.uk/] or **Sheflug** [http://www.sheflug.org.uk/] to get help on the use of FLOSS. If you're an activist with an interest in FLOSS contact **AktiviX** [http://www.burngreave.net/mailman/listinfo/AktiviX].

Remember, if at first you don't succeed ask someone else.

WSIS? We Seize!

The **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)** is a full United Nations Summit to be held 10–12 December 2003 in Geneva with a second meeting in Tunis in 2005. [http://www.itu.int/wsis/]

Community media and other civil society organisations are organising a number of events to run alongside and contra to the WSIS which, they believe, fails to promote media diversity or engage with the question of fair access to the Information Society.

The Summit's stated objective is to address the inequalities that will arise as the world changes from an industrial to information-based society. Information is a powerful tool for economic and social development and the WSIS will provide a platform for the UN, governments, the private sector along with civil society groups to contribute to bridging digital and knowledge divisions.

However, the WSIS looks set to descend into a farce – Richard Stallman, the free software advocate, said at a recent conference: *"The best thing that can happen with the WSIS is to break down – civil society groups are organising a vigorous counter strategy to ensure that their voice, and that of community media, gets heard."*

Geneva-03 [http://geneva03.org/], has been discussing how to intervene in, outside of, counter to, or as an alternative to the agenda and organization of the WSIS. Geneva-03 sees the whole Summit as a smokescreen – *"Although it talks about the digital divide, knowledge dissemination, social interaction, political engagement, media, education, and health, this language is used to mystify the continuing use of information to protect and advance the interests of global capital."*

Geneva-03 has planned a number of activities in reaction to the corporate-sponsored UN agenda:s

WSIS? We Seize! – a strategic convention before the UN summit in Geneva, comprising discussions, panels and presentations.
A **Polimedia Lab** [http://hubproject.org/] to share tools, skills, experiences, and knowledge.
A three-day webcast **High Noon** that will follow the rotation of the earth, streaming independent media activism and community media projects from across the globe.

As part of WSIS? We Seize!, Geneva-03 will invite ICT workers from all over the world including Asian call centre workers and Korean trade unionists, amongst others. Panels will address the growing problem of 'e-waste' and redundant technology. The environmental impact of the mining of coltane, used in the production of micro-chips, from the Congo will also be examined. Groups such as the 'consumer guerilla brigade' **Yo Mango** have also been invited to Geneva to stage their theatrical subversions. The psychogeographers of the **Bureau d'Etudes** at the **Université Tangente** will be undertaking a sophisticated mapping exercise of Geneva to illustrate and expose the complex interplay of the forces of power and influence around the WSIS.

Hacker groups and free software practitioners such as the **Metabolic BioHackLab** from Spain and the **Autistici** from Italy will engage in the polimedia lab to create free and autonomous technical spaces in which to exchange knowledge and skills. The **Linux Professional Institute** will hold an open source software workshop and certification exam lab at the WSIS and it is their intention to put a GNU/Linux 'live' CD in the hands of every WSIS delegate.

Geneva-03 calls for participation – contribute ideas, to get involved in the three-day webcast and create some interesting content, as well as participating in the panels and debates either in person or via the internet. We have a duty to to make sure at the world's very first summit on the Information Society that the global corporate interests realise that we do count and that one day, **we'll seize**!

*[A longer version of this article is available on **Sheffield Indymedia** [http://sheffield.indymedia.org.uk/].]*