FREE SOFTWARE FOUNDATION

Bulletin

Contents

Fifteen years of FSF associate members

By John Sullivan
Executive Director

Last fall marked fifteen years of the FSF's associate membership program. Shortly after, I celebrated my own fifteenth anniversary with the FSF. I've never known an FSF without associate members. The membership program was launched in late 2002 to stabilize the FSF financially, as some previous sources of support—like sales of software and manuals on physical media—were falling out of fashion.

It worked, and it continues to work. Last year, member dues accounted for over half of our total revenue, and nearly ten times as much as we received from corporations. But membership from the start has been much more than a way to donate. Members form a proud community united around the idea that people, in order to be free, must be in control of the software they rely on to live their lives.

Today, we have members in over eighty countries. I feel very close to this community—especially to the 136 members who have been with us all fifteen years. I've gotten to know their names through stuffing thousands of envelopes, exchanging many emails, and shaking hands—first at the annual member meetings we held, at the Libre-

In March, the FSF celebrated our tenth annual LibrePlanet conference, with over 300 participants.

Planet conferences they grew into, and at many other events around the world.

Members drive the success of our campaigns for universal free software adoption and ideological support for user freedom. They are the early adopters of decentralized, federated social networks, and the dedicated users of Replicant, the free version of Android. They advocate in their local schools and places of work. They write much of the free software that makes the modern world operate. I'm incredibly proud to know these folks, and to work side by side with them.

But increasingly, members are joining us who are not long-time free software users or developers. They include folks who don't have the technical know-how to be early adopters. They see the havoc wreaked on people's lives by the likes of Microsoft, Apple, and Facebook, and they want someone to do something about it. These members are just as important. They are key to this movement's success at turning free software into a kitchen table issue.

If the movement is to succeed, we're going to need many more than 4,600 members. But we are finding it increasingly difficult to break through the daily tidal wave of technology news to reach the audiences we need to reach. In 2002, getting on Slashdot guaranteed a flood of attention. That is no longer true, as so many more news sources and newsmakers compete for attention. It is particularly challenging for the FSF, because so many news and news-sharing platforms require nonfree software.

We need your help. If you're not yet a member, please become one. If you are, help recruit others. When you log into your account at `my.fsf.org`, you'll find a membership badge you can use on social media profiles or your Web site. Let your friends and coworkers know why you support user freedom and ask them to join you.

We have a comprehensive list of benefits at `fsf.org/associate/benefits`; the instant messaging service we provide is notable for people who are tired of their communications being surveilled and manipulated by Facebook. We're also expanding resources to help members meet and collaborate. We're relaunching the FSF Associate Membership Forum at `fsf.org/associate/forum`, and putting on more events for members alongside conferences around the world.

This year, we received a $1 million Bitcoin donation from the Pineapple Fund. That will give our work a powerful shot in the arm. But it was associate members who drove the technological and activist work that attracted the donation. There would be no FSF without them. We need you now more than ever. While we've done very well as "small but mighty," I hope that fifteen years from now, we'll be counting our members in the millions.
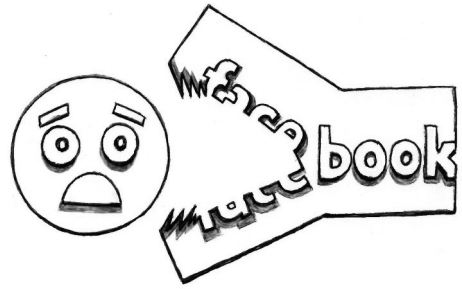
Finding a free software silver lining to the Facebook Cambridge Analytica scandal

By Georgia Young
Program Manager

In 2018, the political data firm Cambridge Analytica was exposed for exploiting social media site Facebook's lax data policies to gather information on millions of people for Donald Trump's presidential campaign. Their micro-targeted messages, based on that cache of online activity, aimed to win votes for Trump—and Facebook did not tell users their information was used.

This latest violation by the site didn't surprise free software activists, but others were stunned that the data gathered by privacy-unfriendly sites like Facebook (which force you to relinquish control over your computing to someone else's server—see u.fsf.org/2kj—and impose nonfree JavaScript for the parts that do run on your local system) might be used to influence elections.

We have long been aware that nonfree software harms people, and that companies like Facebook are deliberately tracking as much of your Web activity as possible, because, whether they're selling shoes or a political candidate, advertisers will pay for it. But a silver lining can be salvaged from these highly publicized violations of (unwarranted) trust by proprietary peddlers: we get to tout the benefits of dis-

tributed, user-controlled, free software to our friends, family, and community.

Here are some Facebook-related discussion points. Try them out on someone who is considering leaving the site or making the switch to free software (visit u.fsf.org/2kh for libre social media alternatives like Mastodon, GNU social, and Diaspora).

Privacy and corporate surveillance. Using Facebook, or any Service as a Software Substitute or nonfree software, practically guarantees your privacy will be violated (see u.fsf.org/2kj). Facebook claims to provide a "personalized experience," but its terms of service (at u.fsf.org/2kk) say this is based on the data it gathers about you, including "what you share and do on and off our Products." Facebook admits it is gathering as much information as possible about you, always.

Some people say they aren't concerned about privacy, because they have nothing to hide. Talk to them about Cambridge Analytica influencing political votes via micro-targeting—no matter your politics,

the fact that one's personal information could be used for political propaganda is pretty creepy.

Government surveillance. This sort of corporate surveillance is tied to mass government surveillance. As revealed in 2013, the US National Security Agency's PRISM program has gathered massive amounts of information, including emails, search history, and chats from Facebook, Google, Apple, and others since 2007 (see `u.fsf.org/o3`). If you do any political organizing in "private" Facebook groups, or just RSVP to a protest via a Facebook event, governments know about it. If you don't think you're at risk in your own country, you could be targeted if you travel to another country where beliefs you've expressed on Facebook are unacceptable or illegal.

Free, distributed software. Finally, there are many reasons for using free, distributed software instead. With free software, the code can be examined by anybody—if I don't have the technical knowledge to analyze how code behaves, I can read independent analyses by people who can. I do not have to go in blind, forced to trust that software is not acting with ill intent.

Sites like Facebook take control away from the user, because the software you are running is not on your own computer. They also consolidate control and surveillance—nearly 2 billion people use Facebook, which means the site has gathered a truly massive amount of personal data. Using distributed, free software puts control back in the hands of the user: you can self-host a personal or social Web site, or use the same software by choosing from among many smaller hosts, which you may feel are more trustworthy.

(There's still a risk of privacy violation with decentralized free software, which is why government regulation prohibiting those violations is important: read more about decentralized and federated software on the FSF High Priority Projects list at `u.fsf.org/27u`.)

The free software movement gets stronger as it grows. The libre silver lining to dastardly behavior like Cambridge Analytica's use of Facebook user information is that it gives you the opportunity to introduce people to privacy-respecting, decentralized free software. Help everyone #DeleteFacebook and get free!

Tech updates, episode 2018: A GNUHope

By Ruben Rodriguez, Ian Kelling,
and Andrew Engelbrecht
FSF Tech Team

Over the last six months, the FSF tech team has been busy with system upgrades. We migrated services to our new Ceph-based server stack, which we are calling "GNUHope," and added more code to our Ansible configurations to increase automation.

In January, we upgraded our CiviCRM instance to the latest version, and fixed issues with our custom code. With the help of a previous intern and many volunteers, we successfully streamed and recorded video at our annual LibrePlanet conference, uploading the recordings to our GNU MediaGoblin instance (see `media.libreplanet.org`). We also recently hit a record low in the tech team's task queue: 150 tickets, down from 280 in October, after resolving over a thousand new tickets.

The infrastructure that runs our office also got some love. Over the last year, we have been consolidating the multiple services we use for our office work into a more compact stack, getting us closer to our goal of having a single large server running all our local systems. Getting to that goal would continue to simplify maintenance and lower power usage, noise levels, and heat. The new machine ("Hal") runs on a Respects Your Freedom (RYF) certified platform, so it will never tell us, "I'm afraid I can't do that." (For more information on RYF certification, see `ryf.fsf.org`.)

As we completed major tasks, we took some time to prioritize and plan for upcoming projects. As we write this, here are the projects at the top of the list:

Complying with European Union General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The proper handling of personal data is extremely important for us, and this regulation seems to be a very positive step overall. A recent survey says that 15% of businesses said they think they will be GDPR compliant by the May 25, 2018 enforcement date (see `u.fsf.org/2kt`). Based on our experience, many widely used free software projects still have a lot of room for improving documentation and functionality to enable their users to more easily comply with GDPR, and we look forward to helping as we make sure our own house is in order.

Upgrading virtual machines, and deploying and consolidating a few more servers. One project we are keen to finish in this category is the improvement of our mail servers, which will be transferred into GNUHope.

Renewing our internal infrastructure and services, and upgrading the systems we offer to free software communities to run development work. We are preparing a new set of machines to host build farms, continuous integration systems, and other heavy-duty tasks. This serves the dual purpose of increasing our ability to support projects that develop fully free software, while separating their hardware from our mission-critical systems.

Redesigning and modernizing fsf.org. This is a very large project; our first step here is to select and implement a new associate member discussion forum. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of exciting new forum-like software,

and we hope that a new one will help build a stronger and more active member community.

We do all this hard work to continue sustaining and advancing the free software community, the GNU Project, the FSF, and our members. Our infrastructure improvements will directly benefit thousands of developers, and indirectly, millions of downstream GNU/Linux users. It could not have been done without your generous contributions, so we thank you, and we hope you will continue with your very needed support. If you are interested in volunteering your sysadmin skills to help with projects like these, please contact us at `sysadmin@gnu.org`. ✒

The threat of government-run Digital Restrictions Management

By Donald Robertson

Licensing and Compliance Manager

In Lawrence Lessig's book *Code Version 2.0* (`codev2.cc`), he warns of a world in which control is not manifested via laws and regulations alone, but by the ability to change the very nature of reality. When we use software, what is possible or impossible to do is dictated by the underlying code. So whoever writes the code, or has the power to change it, has the power to control the users running it. As our lives and interactions are increasingly implemented in software, whoever has control over that software has control over us. If we control our own computing, we have freedom; if someone else controls our computing, we are under their dominion. And if that someone else is our own government, the threat to our freedom is especially dire, as they have a far greater power to restrict or eliminate our rights.

That is why free software is so critical, and why Digital Restrictions Management (DRM) is so dangerous. With DRM, the "keys to the castle" belong to whomever implements the DRM—historically, media distribution companies trying to block copying. These "digital handcuffs" allow anyone who implements them to restrict what you can do with your software or devices. Companies initially claiming they needed DRM to prevent unauthorized copying have abused it even further, using it to block text-to-speech readers, to restrict even public domain works, to prevent fast-forwarding through commercials, and so on. DRM's true purpose is control, and now governments are realizing just how powerful this kind of control can be.

Various agencies want to control users via DRM in order to implement the laws and regulations they are tasked with enforcing. The US Environmental Protection Agency wanted DRM to remain on cars, so that users couldn't avoid emissions controls—despite the fact that Volkswagen vehicles came

with a program, unmodifiable by users, that subverted emission controls. The US Food and Drug Administration also wants DRM on 3D printers, so that users can't print medical devices that don't conform to their regulations. The National Association of Secretaries of State also signed on to a statement promoting DRM on electronic voting machines, worried that without DRM, people could tamper with election results. (See `u.fsf.org/2k1` to learn more.)

In each example, an agent of the government realized they could enforce their rules without having to do their job. The power of DRM to control is so great that they supposed they could enforce their regulations just by not allowing users to avoid DRM, and they didn't care about the collateral damage to user freedom.

But why stop there? At some point, these agencies will realize that they don't have to implement a law or regulation in the first place. By dictating what people can or cannot do via DRM, on proprietary software which no one can review, they can implement an unchecked form of control with no possibility of appeal. Companies already use this power to wring additional profits and personal data from users. After all, why bother putting a term into an end-user license agreement or terms of service, which could theoretically be challenged in arbitration or the courts, when you can simply dictate what the user can do via software? And governments will catch onto this, just as they have already started to enforce their laws and regulations via DRM. As long as governments can get companies to implement DRM with particular restrictions, and impose legal penalties for avoiding those restrictions via laws like the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, they can exert control without having to go through the normal legal channels for creating laws and regulations.

The rule of law requires that people have fair warning of the laws they are subject to, and that they have a mechanism to appeal the execution of those laws. With DRM, there is no public record of the rules enacted and no courts to challenge their application. With DRM, the rules begin and end in the device or software itself, and whoever has control over the code has dictatorial power over the users. Democracy cannot function when such supreme control is possible, so we must fight to ensure that users always retain control over their own computing. That is why we fight DRM through our campaign at `defectivebydesign.org`, and why we need you to join us.

Uber takes software users for a ride

By Molly de Blanc

Campaigns Manager

Uber has a long history of abusing its users. The company is known for its ride sharing app, which connects drivers with riders, similar to a taxi service. The surveillance abilities of the app are astounding.

By using "God View," employees of Uber were able to view the activity and details of cars and passengers (see u.fsf.org/uber1). They would use the app to follow celebrities, "ex-boyfriends, ex-girlfriends, and ex-spouses" (see u.fsf.org/ub2). In 2017, the company had an always-on tracking anti-feature, which would continually monitor the location of users—even when the app was off (see u.fsf.org/uber3).

When using the app, riders provide exact pickup and drop off addresses to drivers. Uber currently retains this information in the driver's account history. Rather than it being available for only the duration of the ride, drivers have been given continued access to the homes, destinations, and travel patterns of users. This access has led to numerous cases of assault and stalking by drivers (see u.fsf.org/uber4). It was only in April 2018 that Uber announced a plan to pilot a program that would obscure exact locations in driver history (see u.fsf.org/2kx).

The ability of Uber to abuse users does not end with location data. The company can monitor things like battery level: they were able to determine that "those with a low battery tend to accept the surge price because they need a ride home that minute" (see u.fsf.org/uber5). While Uber denies that they actually use battery life to affect surge pricing, the company has been known to lie to users about safety, security, and monitoring (see u.fsf.org/ub6).

Uber's surveillance capabilities should never have been so panoptic in the first place—a situation that could have been prevented if the app was free software. When software is free, security researchers and those looking to enhance and personalize the software can identify fundamental issues with safety and security. The app's behavior on mobile devices can be changed directly or by using patches and add-ons—like those used in a Web browser.

By giving users control, they can limit the data being shared by the app. While you would not be able to control the company's servers, you would be able to control how your phone interacts with them. By having the right to modify the code, the abusive parts of the app could be removed. Redistributing modifications would provide these same benefits to other users. Free software can address the client side of the problem; then policy or public pressure can be brought to bear on how Uber uses the data on their servers.

Anyone using a proprietary third party app should be aware of what they are giving up when they

allow a company access to their mobile devices: safety, security, and freedom. However, it should not be necessary to give up so much just to use mobile services. Apps need to be free, and licensing is just the first step. They need to be available on F-Droid—the freedom respecting app marketplace at `f-droid.org`—and compatible with free operating systems. It is only through such comprehensive change that users can be free in their mobile devices.

On the road with RMS

By Jeanne Rasata

Assistant to the President

Free Software Foundation president Richard Stallman's commitment to getting the word out on the importance of free software has been as steadfast as ever over the past six months. In spite of a quiet December and January, he still managed to take part in 26 events. He participated in 2 panels and gave 24 speeches, 16 of them at conferences, with 6 of the speeches being keynote speeches. One of his speeches was in French, and the rest were about equally divided between Spanish and English. All told, his speeches were heard by about 6,500 to 7,500 people, in 23 cities, in 6 countries.

In the fall, RMS spoke at several events in Mexico, and then returned to the US for a visit to California. In Sacramento, he spoke to an audience of software developers and state-government IT staff for Child Welfare Digital Services, a project aiming to "change the way state government develops software by leveraging free (libre) software, agile methodologies, and user-centered design."

Next, he headed to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, where he spoke about freedom in software and in object design at Maker Faire Galicia, a software-, hardware-, and free-community-centered festival for inventors. Then, at the University of Innsbruck, in Austria, he participated in a panel and in a lecture series on "Challenges to learning and education in the media age." He talked about education, software freedom, and privacy, and about learning bots and users' freedom, outlining the threats and challenges we face, and what schools have to do to help.

RMS resumed his travels in February, speaking in London and Leicester, in the United Kingdom, and in Oviedo, Spain. Next, he spoke in Rennes, France, at inOut2018, a conference to "debate, invent, test, and decipher the transportation modes of tomorrow," where he gave his speech "The right to anonymous transportation." He also took part in the CampOSV hackathon at inOut2018, geared toward creating prototypes of free-software-run vehicles, and gave his speech "Privacy by design."

March brought RMS back to Boston for LibrePlanet 2018, our

annual software freedom conference, where, as is custom, he delivered a keynote speech and presented the Free Software Awards. He then returned to Mexico for a few more events and talks, before heading to Burlington, Vermont, for Champlain College's Capstone Presentations, "a conference in which senior students [from Information Technology & Services] present the results of their capstone projects (year-long culminating experience projects within their majors)." He delivered his speech "Computing, freedom and privacy" for an audience that included members of the community at large, as well as students from Computer Science & Innovation, Game Programming, Computer & Digital Forensics, Data Analytics, and Computer Networking & Cybersecurity, who would all have had to read RMS's book *Free Software, Free Society* in one of their compulsory classes (!).

See u.fsf.org/zi for a list of RMS's confirmed upcoming engagements. Please write to rms-assist@gnu.org to extend him a speaking invitation. Please also send us any photographs you would like us to share on his blog, at fsf.org/blogs/rms, or recordings of his speeches for our audio-video archive at audio-video.gnu.org.

GNU needs you: How to contribute to a GNU project

By Dana Morgenstein
Outreach and Communications Coordinator

The GNU Project, announced by FSF founder and president Richard Stallman in 1983, began with the goal to enable users to do all of their computing with 100% free software. While we now have a fully functioning GNU operating system, there are countless improvements to be made, new programs to be designed, more platforms to be supported, and other tasks to keep GNU running and spread the word. That's why GNU needs YOU! The full list of ways to help GNU is at gnu.org/help, but hopefully this summary will get you started thinking where you might fit in.

If you already have written useful software that you would like to submit as a GNU package, there's a submission process in place at gnu.org/help/evaluation.html. If you're willing to adhere to the GNU Project's mission for software freedom, you can join 404 other GNU supporters as a GNU maintainer.

If you're looking for a new project, the most urgent items are on the FSF's High Priority Projects page, handpicked by a committee of free software experts informed by feedback from the public as the projects of greatest strategic importance (`u.fsf.org/23y`). Not all of these projects are part of GNU—for example, the Replicant free phone operating system needs supporters to contribute on their forums and wiki, and to submit bugs. But many are, like user-testing for or contributing to the Skype replacement GNU Ring. Choose the project that best fits your interests and expertise, and get started!

Another crucial subsection of the GNU Project that could use your help is accessibility. Like all computer users, people with a range of hearing, sight, movement, and cognitive abilities deserve control over their technology, but few programs and Web sites comply with accessibility standards. Furthermore, proprietary programs keep everyone from altering them to suit their needs, and companies only add accessibility features when there's a business reason for doing so, leaving many users behind. Learn more at `gnu.org/accessibility`.

Technologically adept GNU fans can contribute in many other ways, including:

• Writing free manuals and documentation for GNU software;
• Taking over an unmaintained GNU package;

• Contributing to `h-node.org`, a repository that contains information on how particular hardware does or doesn't work with free software;
• Volunteering as a technical system administrator for Savannah, which hosts free software projects;
• Volunteering as a GNU Webmaster; and more.

If you're not a techie, we can still use your help! We are constantly in need of translators for the GNU Web site—if you're fluent in English and another language, email `web-translators@gnu.org` to get started on a translation team.

You can also simply spread awareness: subscribe to the monthly *Free Software Supporter* at `fsf.org/fss`, spread the word far and wide, and use as much free software as you can every day.

GNU's thirty-plus years of success have been driven by individuals joining together to make a difference. We hope you'll join us!

How to Contribute

Associate Membership:
Become an associate member of the FSF. Members will receive a bootable USB card, email forwarding, a 20% discount on FSF merchandise, and an account on the FSF's Jabber/XMPP server. To sign up or get more information, visit `member.fsf.org` or write to `membership@fsf.org`.

Online: Use your credit card or PayPal account to make a donation at `donate.fsf.org` or contact `donate@fsf.org` for more information on supporting the FSF.

Jobs: List your job offers on our jobs page: `fsf.org/jobs`.

Free Software Directory:
Browse and download from thousands of different free software projects: `directory.fsf.org`.

Volunteer: To learn more, visit `fsf.org/volunteer`.

LibrePlanet: Find local groups in your area or start your own at `libreplanet.org`!

Free Software Supporter: Receive our monthly email newsletter: `fsf.org/fss`.