Libre Services:
A non-proprietary model for delivery of Internet services

Executive Summary

Document # PLPC-100101
Version 1.0
March 26, 2006

Available on-line at:
http://www.freeprotocols.org/PLPC/100101

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Versions of this article

The ideas presented in this article are intended to be accessible to a wide audience, including both technical and non-technical readers.

To accommodate different levels of reader sophistication the article is available in two alternative versions: A General Version (for non-technical readers), and a Technical Version (for technical readers). It is also available as just an Executive Summary, and in a presentation format.

- **General Version**. This version includes background information and explanatory material for a non-technical audience. If you are unfamiliar with the software industry and the principles of free software, this is the recommended version.
- **Technical Version**. A condensed version for software engineering professionals. If you are already familiar with the software industry and free software, this is the version to read.
- **Executive Summary**. A summary of the key ideas of the article.
- **Presentation format**. The main ideas in the form of a slide presentation.

Each version is available in several different file formats (HTML, PDF, PostScript) at:
http://www.libreservices.org/libreManifesto/conceptAndBootstrapping

Executive Summary

The Internet has created an enormous new offshoot of the software industry: the **Internet services** industry. This industry has become a key medium, not just for day-to-day communications and productivity, but also for the expression of information and ideas.

However, this vitally important new industry exists entirely in the form of the traditional proprietary software model. Within the general software arena, the free software movement is well established as an alternative to proprietary software. But as yet, the free software movement has no formal presence within the Internet services domain.

We are a group of engineers with a vision for the future of Internet services. We believe that the free software movement as we see it today is just the beginning, and the next major evolutionary phase of free software is its strong emergence into the Internet services arena.

We believe that the intellectual property ownership mechanisms of patents, copyright and trade secrecy, as they exist today, have almost no legitimacy at all within this arena. At bottom these ownership mechanisms are business constructs, intended to provide competitive advantage in a commercial context. That they do. But they do so at great cost to the broader society. Some of the societal costs are obvious; others are more subtle and indirect. But the costs are real, and very far-reaching. They include:

- A crippling of the software engineering profession. These ownership mechanisms cut directly across the engineering *freedom of action* that is the foundation of the software development process.
- The loss to the public of the technical benefits of unrestricted engineering development.
- In the case of Internet services based on commercial providers, the compromising of a number of important civil liberties, including personal privacy, freedom of information, and freedom of speech.
- A severe distortion of the competitive business environment.
- Eventual loss of governance of the Internet to purely commercial interests.

Instead of the proprietary software model, we are advocates of the free software movement, in which software is treated as a communal resource, freely available for reuse by anyone. Our ultimate vision is a completely open software industry, in which *all computing and communications is based entirely on free software*.

We are proposing a radically new, completely non-proprietary model for the delivery of Internet services. We call this the **Libre Services** model.

Libre Services are an extension of the principles of free software into the Internet services domain. They are Internet services that may be freely copied and reused by anyone. They are a communal resource, not owned by anyone, freely available for use by society at large. Any company, organization or individual can reproduce and host any Libre Service, either for their own use, or for commercial or non-commercial delivery to others. The Libre Services model exists in relationship to the proprietary Internet services model of AOL, MSN and Yahoo, in an analogous way to how GNU/Linux exists in relation to Microsoft Windows.

This is a radical departure from the existing commercial model, with societal benefits that are equally radical and far-reaching. The Libre Services model provides a range of critical *freedoms* that are entirely absent from the proprietary model:

- The *freedom* of the engineering community to engage in unrestricted creative development, building new and better Internet services for the benefit of the public.
- The *freedom* of any group or community to operate their own Libre Services, according to whatever principles they see fit. Since they are no longer subject to the actions of a commercial service provider, this guarantees a range of critical civil liberties: privacy, protection against government monitoring, freedom of information, freedom of ideas, freedom of speech.
- The *freedom* of the business community to participate in the Internet services industry, without any intellectual property barriers standing in the way. Libre Services transform the closed industry of today into a truly open industry, creating major new business opportunities and industry growth.

Libre Services are the right way to deliver Internet services to the user. Our goal is to establish Libre Services as a non-proprietary alternative to the existing proprietary services industry.

In this article we describe the Libre Services concept, and how we intend to turn it into a reality. A key component of our bootstrapping strategy is a **project-based** model for collaborative participation. We have defined a set of independent, self-contained projects required to move this initiative forward. This allows efficient, coordinated collaboration on multiple bootstrapping tasks in parallel.