

OK, so you have recommended a GNU/Linux flavour to someone who is interested, and you go and help her in installing her new system. Linux understands all the hardware, everything turns out to be a success (except for the to-be-spanked webcam), and here is a new desktop computer filled with free software. And then your fellow wants to watch some online video or listen to an MP3 stream - quite usual things to do. And the new system tells you, that it is intended to download some interesting things called "codecs" which are needed in order to watch a video or listen to an audio stream. And the new Linux-based desktop system tells the user that this may or may not be illegal in any particular country - Continue or Cancel? No more information is given.

And most users click Continue... And many users start to violate immediately their country's patent laws. Is this a crime?

If this is a crime - an illegal thing to do -, then the user is responsible for committing it. This must be a very small crime, but it is illegal. Some patent holders will not get their patent fees. And it is not about software patents - these are somewhat more complex technological patents, established for a long-long time. You can debate on it, but it is out there in the legal code, and is violated day by day. This is a small crime by an individual, and probably never ever will anybody punish an individual for this. But this has a bigger effect when you consider a larger scale of deployments. Ten million small individual crimes may add up to a large patent fee not paid, and that is a loss from the due payments of the economy. Audio and video codec developers... Many many company.

Most GNU/Linux distributions encourage this small crime - it is really easy, one click to commit it, and there is quite few information about it being committed. There are codec packs with paid patents for Linux systems, but the basic setup will not tell about it - instead, it shows just that small dialog. May be illegal. You can not know. We don't know either. Continue or Cancel?

There are large companies outside of Linux's scope, which do the same, and encourages a user to commit a crime for profit. For example, Microsoft sells their OEM software without the patent fees paid - such paying should be made by "the deployer" from entities like MPEG LA. But MPEG LA does not talk to end users, and the mentioned OEM software is available from the stores worldwide, so many end users are deployers at the same time. Those end users are forced to commit that small crime, using an illegal codec supplied by Microsoft. But this is not a problem regarding the individuals that use Linux on desktops. This is not a problem for Linux.

The problem for desktop Linux adoption is in networking. I mean networking with the companies that are the patent holders of such multimedia codecs. For example, the MPEG2 codec has

Walls

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patents from many companies worldwide. About 30 or 40. Large and small companies. Those companies may not have an inspiration to cooperate on driver development and supporting Linux in other ways as long as desktop Linux users tend to use their patented technologies illegally. And MPEG2 is just one codec of the many. Those companies may think: Linux users don't pay us what is due, so why should we support Linux? Instead, we should hide mandatory information and slow their adoption that way. Have you met such company walls already?

This, what I described, is a simple economical phenomena. Companies don't support entities which don't support companies.

We should find the ways to turn down the walls.