

Comparing Creativity in the Creative and Software Industries

by George Grinstead

Since the 1998 announcement by the Netscape Corporation that it was preparing to 'Open-Source' its Netscape Navigator program code the Open Source movement has managed to flip the standard commercial software production model completely on its head. Before Open Source only one third of corporate software development projects ended on time, on budget and within scope – clearly something was wrong with the industry. By providing a means of production that has returned greater cost efficiency, higher productivity and more reliable products the Open Source movement has co-opted the corporate world into its, Hacker, ethic. This ethic is built on the desire to share and build upon each other's work so that energy is not wasted on replicating the work of others, an ethic that can be seen in many non-computing related fields. What is different, however, with the Hacker movement is that it designs its own means of production – the hardware and software of the digital age.

Now, as computing and digitisation spreads into more and more facets of our daily lives it is the same people who design and build the means of production (or at least communication) for more and more of the world's population. Almost all e-mail passes through software designed by Hackers, 60% plus of websites are served using software designed by a remote consortium of strangers, the Firefox and Safari browsers are by no means winning the browser war but they are providing the only competition to Microsoft's market dominance and both were built using the Open Source model – where is the old model of production in such an important sphere?

Like many people attending Submerge, I have to straddle the computing and art/design fields on a daily basis and whilst I have noticed a refreshing change in the software industry with the advent of Open Source, I have noticed a more worrying trend in the freshly marketed 'Creative Industries'.

The very term 'Creative Industries' implies by definition factories and excessive commercialisation and unfortunately I think this is its intention. With organisations such as Own It being heavily promoted to young artists/designers alongside courses such as Creative Entrepreneurs we are seeing a government sponsored move to further commoditise creativity, to apply business models to its production, attempts to export it as one of Britain's best products and the creation of a climate of fear of plagiarism that only Intellectual Property Rights law can prevent. What is interesting is that this push is sending the 'Creative Industries' towards the very position that the software industry has spent the last seven years fighting its way out of – a world of Intellectual Property, Patents and Copyright that crippled its producers and provided short-term profits to its owners, who were rarely the same people.

This presentation is not meant to imply that this move isn't being resisted but to highlight the positive implications of sharing and see if the creative producers present come to the same conclusion the software industry did in 1998.