

More BBC & IPTV

More BBC and IPTV: Project Canvas

We wrote at length to express our concerns about Project Canvas at the time the consultation was opened ([1], details here).

Our chief concern, then as now, remains that in a world where use of a computer (netbook, smartphone) is becoming essential, it becomes ever more important to avoid lock-in to technologies that only enable high-cost access, do not properly address security issues and wrest control away from the user of those technologies with little or no recourse.

Unfortunately, ...

... despite the BBC's published recognition of the challenge arising from the digital divide [2] Project Canvas is a retrograde response.

It has again put the interests of large content providers over the rest of us using the standard false dilemma presented by vested interest - if you disagree with these limitations on your freedom you are supporting copyright theft. (Apparently, left to our own devices, we are incapable of making moral choices or respecting the rights of others).

In fact this is the manner of the debate conducted over the wider project that is Digital Britain [3]. Here we see late night Parliamentary additions (ironically by LibDem Peers) [4] of draconian and uncalled for measures to arbitrarily restrict user rights with plans to disconnect "infringers" from the internet, enforcement which is draconian and disproportionate, with no means of a more reasonable punishment such as a small fine. Nor will it be possible to limit the liability to actual infringers.

It's all of a piece, despite the emergence of many cheap but good alternative platforms for content and access (all based on GNU/Linux and other Free Software) and the possibility of using Linux based solutions to revitalise existing computers thought to be defunct (rather than adding them to landfill...) the whole initiative is designed to promote the interests of large producers at the expense of the individual consumer. The powerful dictating to the less powerful. And, of course, with no regard to the green agenda or, in the software industry at least, a strong, vibrant and localised economy.

Welcome to the future, high cost insecure computing funded by the many (whether directly or through redistribution) to support the few.

[1] <http://www.opensourceconsortium.org/content/view/93/1/>

[2] http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2009/10_october/16/digital.shtml

[3] <http://interactive.bis.gov.uk/digitalbritain/>

[4] <http://www.libdemvoice.org/digital-economy-bill-org-17898.html>

Gerry Gavigan
Chair
Open Source Consortium