

# Reckoning with new app store changes: Is now our chance?

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# My mission

I want **all** computer users to be able to do **everything** they need to do on **any** computer, using **only** free software.

# My free software affiliations

- F-Droid
- Debian
- Alliterative Advising, LLC

# Why I'm talking about app stores

- Sidekick
- Nokia E61
- HTC G1
- Nokia N900
- OpenMoko Neo Freerunner
- Protest at the iPad launch
- Lots of “new iPhone” protests
- Various Replicant devices
- PinePhone (Mobian)

# Importance of mobile devices for freedom

- Ubiquitous: Replaced regular computers for so many people (70% of (US?) people age 3+ use a smartphone)
- Parasites: Collect and expose so much data
- Gatekeepers: Our keycards for access to services
- Interlopers: In the middle of our communications
- Disruptors: Changed the way software is distributed

# Why do we have app stores

- “Security”
- Quality standards – battery, user experience
- Discoverability
- Payment to developers
- Keeping apps updated

# Why do we actually have app stores

- Apple:
  - Requires all browsers use WebKit
  - Only allows Apple apps to use the iPhone's NFC chip
  - Removed Hkmap.live (used to track police activity)
- Google:
  - Removed "The Revolution of Our Times" (protest game)
  - Removed various ad blockers

# App store (in)compatibility with free software

- Terms of use, terms for developers
- Digital Restrictions Management (DRM)
- Lack of labeling, searchability
- Certain content policies
- Source code links
- Challenges around “fake” versions



## Google's policies

Google Play is not the only way to install apps on Android devices. Amazon and Samsung, for example, run their own app stores for Android, plus users can directly install applications – even additional “app stores” like F-Droid. So the issue with Google is more the way it uses its “soft power.”

# Epic Games and Match Group vs Google

- November 6: Jury trial for antitrust case starts in California
- Complaints about Google Play policies and fees for in-app purchases
- 2021: 37 state attorneys general (bipartisan) also suing Google
- Google response: Lower commission fees, but also forcing apps to use Play Store billing

# Apple's policies

- Epic sued Apple too.
- Judge found that Apple must allow other payment systems
- ...but also that the App Store is not a monopoly (!!!)
- and that Epic violated its contract with Apple

## Apple's policies changing?

As of December 2022, there are rumors that Apple will allow iOS users to install software from outside of the App Store, when iOS 17 is released. The deadline for compliance with the EU's Digital Market and Services Act is 2024.

[https://www.engadget.com/  
apple-third-party-app-stores-report-195840839.html](https://www.engadget.com/apple-third-party-app-stores-report-195840839.html)

# How free programs have responded

- Shunning
- License exceptions
- License change
- F-Droid organization

# The pressure to “open” app stores

- Competition
- Interoperability
- Money (Commissions)

# Is “competitiveness” a free software value?

# EU: Digital Markets Act

- Passed in July 2022 along with the Digital Services Act
- Mandates allowing sideloading
- Calls for interoperability between messaging platforms
- Equal access for independent developers to OS features
- 2024 compliance deadline



## US: NTIA report

The Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) published a report on February 1, 2023, arguing that users should have more control over their devices, and that legislation is likely needed to bolster competition among app stores.

*Above all, these setbacks mean that app developers and alternative mobile app stores are not afforded the opportunity to compete on a fair playing field— whether with each other or with the products and services offered by the gatekeepers. All of these factors translate to potential losses for consumers: prices that are inflated due to the fees collected by gatekeepers, innovation that is hampered by policy decisions to limit access to smartphone capabilities, and the loss of choice of apps that are not featured or even accessible for smartphone users.*

<https://www.ntia.gov>

# US: Open App Markets Act

- `https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/2710`
- Introduced in the Senate in August 2021
- Not yet passed.
- Affects app stores with more than 50 million users

## US: Open App Markets Act

*An app store is a publicly available website, software application, or other electronic service that distributes apps from third-party developers to users.*

*The bill prohibits a covered company from (1) requiring developers to use an in-app payment system owned or controlled by the company as a condition of distribution or accessibility [more stuff about payment systems]...A covered company may not interfere with legitimate business communications between developers and users, use non-public business information from a third-party app to compete with the app, or unreasonably prefer or rank its own apps (or those of its business partners) over other apps.*

# What a better app store world looks like

- Users can choose which apps are default for a purpose (including the app store app)
- Users can remove any app
- Users can control when apps are updated
- No limits on installing any app by “sideloading”
- Promotes values of user freedom
- Facilitates support for developers in a transparent way
- Supports better practices like reproducible builds (builds at all), and clear signatures

# Individual actions we need

- Install F-Droid
- Be difficult / ask questions to app distributors
- Contact your representatives
- As developers, distribute your app outside app stores as a first-class option
- Use a GNU/Linux phone (PinePhone, Librem 5)

# Sources

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# Thank you

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