From the president

Boris Veytsman

Large organizations employ full-time staffers dealing with social media. The TeX Users Group is tiny, so this work is done by volunteers in their free time. In particular, one of my duties as TUG president is the support of our Twitter account. (By the way, if you do not follow @TeXUsersGroup, you may want to.) A significant number of tweets are announcements from CTAN: I forward the information about new TeX packages and the updates for existing ones. While it is easy enough to create an automatic Twitter gateway to post CTAN announcements, I prefer to do this manually; I enjoy starting my day with reading and sharing the news about the community. CTAN announcements are succinct and to the point — ideal Twitter content.

The information about contributions includes their licenses. Recently while posting it, I was startled to see that the license for a new package bans its commercial use, and decided to investigate. Gerd Neugebauer helped me to collect the information presented in Table 1. The LPPL seems to be the most popular license: 56% of packages use it. While the number of packages with "No commercial use" in the license is small (only 2.2%), the appearance of new packages under this is, in my opinion, troubling.

The free software community has a commitment to lofty ideals, and someone might consider the commercial use of our work "debasing" it. However, this would be a wrong conclusion. Many important and noble things are done by commercial entities with a profit motive. I am writing this in the middle of a pandemic, and our hope to overcome it is based on the vaccines, developed in record time by commercial companies with the clear intention to make a profit in the process of saving people. If you are a software author, do you really want to prevent your work from being used for vaccine development? Speaking about the TeX community, our software is widely used by publishers around the world. Do we consider the work of Johannes Gutenberg or Aldus Manutius less worthy because it was done with the need to make a living? On the other hand, there are, unfortunately, many examples of quite bad things done with motives other than direct profit.

Creative Commons guidelines helpfully explain that the most common non-commercial license, CC-NC, prohibits only the use "primarily intended for or directed toward commercial advantage or monetary compensation", and a commercial entity might still use software having an NC license if its primary

Table 1: CTAN package licenses (March 19, 2021)

License	Packages
LPPL, all versions	3448
GPL, all versions	748
Public domain or CC0	300
Open Font licenses (SIL, GFL, GFSL)	157
MIT license	125
BSD licenses, all versions	76
Knuth license	55
Free Documentation License	23
LGPL, all versions	22
Apache license	20
Perl Artistic license, all versions	12
CC BY	12
CC BY-SA, all versions	17
ISC license	2
Open Publication license	1
Other free licenses	353
'Collection' or 'Digest' license tag	24
No commercial use, all licenses	139
License that prevents distribution	73
No source available	29
Shareware	24
Unknown status	553

intention is different. However, the cost of possible litigation makes the use of this software rather risky for a commercial entity in all cases. The even more helpful explanation that a non-profit organization can be in violation if its intentions are wrong makes it risky for non-commercial entities as well.

Our flagship distribution, TeX Live, does not include non-commercial software. As a non-profit, we probably have the right to distribute it (but see above). However, we want to create a TeX distribution that anybody can just use, without evaluating thousands of licenses for the included packages. Moreover, we want anybody to be able to redistribute it, for example, by selling computers with TeX Live among the preloaded software packages. Thus by using a restrictive license, you prevent your package from being included in TeX Live and significantly decrease the number of its users.

To tell the truth, I see only one use case for a non-commercial license: if you plan to separately license your software to commercial entities and charge them. However, this seems to be a rather rare situation for the TeX world.

I think that from an ethical and practical standpoint it makes most sense to follow Knuth's example and distribute your software under a non-restrictive license.

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