The Free Software Foundation takes aim at Gmail

April 4 2011, by Katie Gatto

(PhysOrg.com) -- The Free Software Foundation is at it again, promoting their laudable, if potentially unrealistic, goal to have all software released under a free software license. Their latest target for information freebies is Gmail. For those of you not familiar with this service, Gmail is the free web mail that is provided by Google.

Why does the Free Software Foundation take issue with Gmail? One word: JavaScript. This isn't the organizations first exploration into the world of JavaScript. They commonly post tutorial and articles that explain how to use popular websites without having to run JavaScript, which often runs within your browser. Currently if you disable JavaScript you cannot use Gmail. The Free Software Foundation refers to this at the JavaScript Trap, since users may or may not be aware that the JavaScript is being run by the browser.

This is not a Google specific issue, it is the general stance of the Free Software Foundation that some of the most popular sites on the web, such as Gmail, Twitter and Facebook, rely on JavaScript more than they need to. They also believe that when JavaScript is used, the company providing the product should release it as free software. They also take the position, that when JavaScript is used to provide an optional enhancement to a website, the company should also release a version of a site that does not use JavaScript.

Pardon my editorializing at this point, while free software licenses are a good thing, and this reporter enjoys the wide world of Open Source, the

idea that companies owe these modifications is a little presumptive. There has to be some consideration, not for the companies, but for their users. The public release of the code for these websites and creation of HTML-only versions of these sites could lead to serious security issues. Not everyone is ethical, and once data is released for the public it is impossible to control how it will be used. I for one, would be more than a little angry if my personal data got out, because of your pressure to release everything into the open.

The bottom line is this. If JavaScript bothers you that much, then don't use these sites. No one is forcing you Tweet. Gmail isn't the only game in town. Many people live full and rich lives without a Facebook account.

© 2010 PhysOrg.com