

## UNLOCK THE HANDCUFFS

There are plenty of devices and media that preserve our freedom. We can choose to live without digital handcuffs. We can buy media that we can use forever, in any format of our choice. With a little research, we can choose devices that do not lock us in.

On a political level, we need to decide whether the copyright system should serve only publishers, or also society as a whole and future generations. Rather than preventing any digital reproduction, we need to support business models that respect our fundamental rights to liberty and privacy. We need to build a copyright system that benefits everyone, not just narrow business interests.

Getting rid of provisions that limit citizens' use of legally purchased content is an important first step.

**More information** about **DRM** and about freedom in a digital world:

- Defective by design  
<http://defectivebydesign.org>
- drm.info  
<http://drm.info>
- Wikipedia  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital\\_rights\\_management](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_rights_management)
- EDRI  
<http://edri.org/search/DRM>



# DRM

The strange, broken world of  
Digital Restrictions Management



<https://fsfe.org>



<https://digitalegesellschaft.de>

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The **Free Software Foundation Europe** is a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting Free Software, working to build a free digital society.

The **Digitale Gesellschaft e.V.** is a German registered association, committed to civil rights and consumer protection in terms of internet policy.

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Would you like to watch your **legally bought movies** on different devices? Would you like to **backup your DVDs**? Or would you like to convert your e-books into **different formats**?

Digital Restrictions Management systems place **restrictions on your right** to do all of these things. Your movies or e-books may even **stop working** altogether if the vendor goes bankrupt, or no longer maintains a particular DRM system.

## WHAT IS DRM?

Digital Restrictions Management (DRM) is any technology that is built into an electronic product or service with the aim of limiting its range of uses after purchase. It is designed to prevent customers from using digital technology in ways that do not correspond to the business agenda of a content provider or device manufacturer.

This technology often restricts individuals from doing things that are perfectly legal, so we might not be able to put together a mix of music files we bought legally, or to lend an e-book to a friend. Even backups can be restricted. Restrictions management technology removes basic rights and freedoms in the digital world.

All DRM systems have one thing in common: They give businesses control over things that we, the owners, should be in control of. For example, businesses decide how often we can play the movies we paid for and what kind of files we can read on our e-book reader.

Even if we find a way to circumvent DRM and free us of these restrictions, the European Copyright in the Information Society Directive makes it illegal. This Directive and similar laws help preserve the outdated business models of publishers (of news, literature, music, film and other information), for example by limiting the right to private copying, in a world where virtually everyone has multiple media devices.

Electronic goods are therefore often built to be defective, forbidding the full capacity of the technology to be used, forbidding uses that were entirely uncontroversial before technological progress gave businesses the means to prohibit them.

## DIGITAL RESTRICTIONS OR CITIZENS' RIGHTS?

There are many different DRM systems on the market. They are incompatible with each other, making it even more difficult for citizens to use legally purchased content.

If we buy movies from Apple, we have to use Apple software to watch our collection and we are no longer free to choose competing products and services. This weakens competition and restricts innovation.

People with disabilities are often barred from media use because DRM prevents them from converting content to formats they can use despite their disabilities. For example, book publishers protested against the capacity of Amazon's e-book reader, to electronically convert text into speech. Amazon bent to the publishers' will and deactivated the text-to-speech feature for many books which means blind people will simply not be able to read those books.

Digital Restrictions Management also changes how laws and regulations are applied: Making use of exceptions that copyright legislations allows for, is made impossible because DRM systems are inflexible. It is for example legal to quote copyrighted material; DRM systems restrict any kind of copy, also the ones that are meant to be used as quotations. This means we have to type each word manually and we lose the advantages a digital copy would normally have.



## LOSING DIGITAL HERITAGE

Our oldest written sources date back hundreds or even thousands of years. But digital files are written on perishable material, such as CDs or flash memory. These devices often wear out after only a few years. If Digital Restrictions Management systems chain our contemporary culture (whether books, music or films) to those devices and media, they will be lost with the medium they are stored on.

While locked in culture is already a big problem for private use, it is a much greater issue for libraries, archives, museums and other institutions. They store and disseminate our records, which are becoming increasingly digital and they need to be able to copy content. Furthermore, DRM systems only last as long as the companies that sell them. When a DRM system disappears, the content stays locked forever.

While libraries and archives once preserved our cultural knowledge for centuries, they are now forced to spend significant sums of public money on material that will become unreadable in a few short years; a wealth of cultural, historical and educational sources will be lost. Future researchers might wonder why today's society locked away its own culture from itself.

## THE SPY IN YOUR POCKET

DRM provides device makers, software companies and media publishers with access to our devices. Those businesses decide how we use digital content and they receive their customers' consent to spy on them through 'take it or leave it' terms and conditions. Those terms and conditions are often very lengthy and are designed to not be understood by ordinary citizens, so many people never read them; but even if they do and disagree, it is usually difficult to return an item at that point.

In 2009, Amazon electronically intruded into its customers' e-book readers to delete books that they had sold by mistake. Among the deleted ones was George Orwell's 1984, a book about a dystopian world that has a device called 'memory hole', in which the government makes unauthorised material disappear forever. Amazon later promised not to use the deletion feature again, unless ordered to do so by a government. The irony of that situation could hardly have been clearer.

Vendors can track what music we listen to and which books we read. We have no control over where this information goes once it leaves our devices.

## CREATIVITY UNCHAINED

Today, we have access to an unprecedented amount of knowledge in digital form. The knowledge we have collected and improved over generations is our cultural heritage. Restriction-free projects like Wikipedia and Free Software are leaders in many areas; they prove what we can achieve when we set knowledge free.

DRM is an attempt to preserve a dying business model in the digital age and to restrict competition. Businesses try to model modern technology based on the old system in which businesses controlled all the content. This would eliminate many advantages of modern technology.

Copyright laws also have not quite been able to keep up. Publishers and citizens alike are calling for copyright reform, but with different intentions.

We need to decide: Should we accommodate the interests of a small but vocal group of corporations; should we allow businesses to determine where the limits are for our sharing of knowledge and culture or are the moral and social implications of restrictive legal barriers too serious to ignore?