

Seven Reasons NOT to Steal Software

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Some of the arguments people (including maybe even your parents) will advance to defend the practice of software theft should be met immediately and squashed. Here are classic defences of illegal copying and some suggested ripostes:

Everyone's doing it.

Response: So what? Doesn't make it right or even legal. Ethical behaviour is not conditional on popularity.

We won't get caught.

Response: So what? Being caught has no bearing on whether the act is moral or legal. Doing bad things gets to be a habit regardless of whether anyone finds out about it. And companies that approve any kind of illegality are opening themselves up to blackmail or denunciation.

It's the software company's fault: if they don't want theft, they should charge less.

Response: First of all, even shareware authors get cheated by people who use their software without paying for it – and these are packages for which the authors ask for a few dollars. Secondly, the owner of the software has no obligation to meet someone else's view of appropriate pricing. Thirdly, no one has a right or entitlement to use proprietary software; if you don't like the price, find a more cost-effective alternative.

But I need it and I don't want to pay for it.

Response: Even if you could define *need* so flexibly as to include your wish to use someone else's tools, how does that justify theft? Are you going to rob a bank tomorrow so you want – oh, excuse me, need – a car? Or why not just mug someone so you can have their jacket?

It doesn't hurt anyone.

Response: Yes it does. Software vendors, including individual entrepreneurs and employees, suffer from having half to seven-eighths of their potential sales eliminated through theft. How would you like it if you were trying to earn a living providing a service or a tool – and half the potential clients simply stole your product without paying you anything at all? And furthermore, every software theft makes the next theft even more likely.

It only hurts a company – I wouldn't steal it from an individual.

Response: Oh, Robin Hood, eh? The *company* isn't a machine, it's a group of people who agree to work together according to terms they agree on. Steal from the company and you steal from employees, owners and other stakeholders. You may even hurt honest users by contributing to higher prices. Where's the line you're drawing? Would you steal from a corner store owned by Mom and Pop? How about it they had one employee? three? fifteen?

No software should ever be copyrighted--it should always be free.

Response: Do you earn a salary or would you like to? Why not donate your time instead? Did you pay for your computer? But why? Why not decide that computer hardware shouldn't be patented – it should be always be free? Since when did people who buy their computers, drive purchased automobiles and own VCRs decide they're in favor of communal property and voluntary labor? Who gave these people the right to determine that *other* people's labor should be free?

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