

Computer Programmers and Users, Watch Out!

What is the problem?

Apple, Lotus, Ashton-Tate, and Xerox are trying to use “look and feel” lawsuits to lock competitors out of the market.

These competitors have implemented work-alike programs or programs more or less similar in mode of use. This sort of imitation is customary—standard practice since the 1960’s—but the lawyers pretend that it is no different from copying a program. They are trying to stretch copyright law as it was never intended; to make new law through the courts, evade public debate, and establish permanent monopolies.

Why should I care?

If you’re a programmer, because your freedom to write programs is in danger.

If you’re a user, because these lawsuits are making computers harder to use. To avoid the risk of a lawsuit, developers are going out of their way to make new products look different from the ones you know. These gratuitous changes serve only to confuse users who move from one wordprocessor or spreadsheet to another.

These incompatible changes make it hard to switch brands—they make users “captive.” This eliminates real competition and the incentive to improve the standard products.

Is that all? The suits just threaten competition?

No! “Look and feel” also threatens innovation.

Computer systems have been getting easier to use because of incremental changes—one programmer imitates the work of another, then makes some improvements. Programs have evolved as programmers learned from each other. “Look and feel” copyright would make this illegal.

And large companies have an unfair advantage wherever lawsuits become commonplace. Since they can easily afford to sue, they can intimidate small companies with threats even when they don’t really have a case.

But don’t they deserve a monopoly on what they did?

Like everyone else in the computer field, Apple, etc. “borrowed” from the work of others. And until these lawsuits, everyone agreed this was legal.

Apple, Lotus, and the others made their business plans and wrote their programs under those rules. Now they say the old rules don’t offer “enough incentive;” but their success under those rules proves this is false. It also shows what their real motive is: **they don’t want any future competitors to have the chance that they had.**

**Boycott Lotus, Apple, Xerox and Ashton-Tate!
Keep Their Lawyers Off Our Computers**

What You Can Do

- Don't buy from Xerox, Lotus, Apple or Ashton-Tate. Buy from their competitors or from the defendants they are suing.
- Don't develop software to work with the systems made by these companies.
- Port your existing software to competing systems.
- Join the League for Programming Freedom and help organize further activities. Annual dues are \$42 for employed professionals, \$10.50 for students, \$21 for others.
 - 1 Kendall Square #143
P.O. Box 9171
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 - (617) 492-0023
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- Above all, don't work for the "look and feel" plaintiffs, and don't accept contracts from them.
- Tell your friends and colleagues about this issue and how it threatens to ruin the computer industry.
- Duplicate this handout, and distribute it at shows and meetings.
- Write to or phone your elected representatives to show them how important this issue is.
 - Senator So and So
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510
 - Representative So and So
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

You can phone senators and representatives at (202) 225-3121.

Suppose "look and feel" copyright were applied to keyboards. Imagine how difficult it would be to switch from computer to computer if the letters on their keyboards were all in different places!

The League for Programming Freedom