

Open Design Hardware — Disclosure Requisites

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Open Source Software has proven that an open design process and liberal licensing contribute towards enhancing the quality, utility, and overall success of software products, and encourage convergence and cooperation among projects.

Open Design Hardware is an approach that aims to enhance quality and value of hardware products by applying an open design process, in keeping with best practices of Open Source Software development.

This document outlines the characteristics and benefits of Open Design Hardware and explains the requisites resulting from this on technical documentation provided by component vendors.

1 Characteristics

Open Design Hardware is guided by the following principles:

- Expose the entire design process to public review.
- Invite contributions from anyone willing and able, irrespective of affiliation.
- Distribute the resulting design under an Open license, permitting use and further modification free from royalties.

Examples of Open licenses include the *General Public License* (GPL)¹ and the *Creative Commons Attribution – Share Alike* license (CC-BY-SA)².

¹<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/gpl.html>

²<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

2 Benefits

Fully disclosing the design and the decision making process leading to it brings the following benefits to development and use of the product:

- Enables prospective buyers and developers to participate in ensuring high quality of the product, e.g., through reviews. This also helps to accelerate the produce development process.
- Permits prospective buyers and VARs to conduct a thorough and honest evaluation of the product design, improving their ability to correctly project the product's use and increasing their confidence in choosing the product.
- Lowers the barrier for developers and integrators to add value, either as early as during the design phase or on top of the finished product.
- Protects the investment of buyers, developers, and integrators by enabling them to make corrections, enhancements, and even derivative products without depending on the availability of the original designers and manufacturer.
- Creates the opportunity for other projects to reuse part or all of the design with a minimum of overhead, and to grow synergies by reciprocating.

3 Documentation requisites

The open hardware development process requires the use of components for which the vendor makes technical product documentation available under terms that allow public use of the information gathered from it. The most common forms of such terms are:

Permissive NDA

Material is provided by the vendor under an NDA tailored to this purpose. The NDA allows open discussion of the design and distribution of the resulting work (schematics, layout, system software) under an Open license.

Public access

The vendor publishes data sheets and related material to the public, e.g., on its Web site. Access to this information for Open Design Hardware is then no different from any other use.

Redistribution rights

The vendor also grants redistribution rights, allowing projects to ensure that documents remain available even when the vendor no longer supports the product.

Public access is preferable over a permissive NDA since it limits the effort that has to be made on both sides before evaluation can begin, reduces the risk of misunderstandings, avoids overhead in the design phase, and frees derivative projects from having to negotiate access as well.