

Claude Rebuilt Half of Photoshop in 11 Days

What closed-source code still protects when one developer and an AI model can rebuild a commercial product from its public behavior, read from the ArtCraft clones of seven Adobe apps

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About this report

Every substantive claim in this report carries an evidence classification and, where applicable, a numbered source. Facts are separated from vendor claims, third-party estimates, the author's assessments, and untested hypotheses. Forward-looking sections use scenarios with observable tripwires rather than point forecasts. Stated assumptions are listed before the analysis begins.

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Scope and evidentiary standard

This report asks how much protection closed-source software still gives a company once one experienced developer, working with an AI coding model, can rebuild a commercial product from what the product visibly does. It uses one case as the anchor: the seven open-source Rust applications that Brandon Thomas, founder of ArtCraft, published between 30 September and 11 October 2026 as replacements for Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere Pro, Lightroom, After Effects, InDesign and Acrobat Pro. From that case it reads outward to the law of clean-room reimplementation, Adobe's patent and contract position, the software categories most and least open to the same treatment, and what software companies should stop handing to outside parties.

The evidence base is unusual for a story this young. Almost everything about the ArtCraft apps can be checked directly: the repositories are public, their commit logs are timestamped, and each project publishes a parity document grading itself against the Adobe product it targets. The author pulled star counts, commit histories, contributor counts, issue counts and release download counts from the GitHub API on 11 October 2026. Those figures are labeled FACT. The parity percentages are the project's own grades of its own work, with written methods but no outside audit, and they are labeled VENDOR CLAIM throughout, even where they are unflattering to the project.

Press coverage of the release has been fast and loose. Several outlets repeated the claim of full Photoshop parity within a month, one headline described the work as reverse engineered, which its author denies, and at least one outlet reported a parity figure that matches an estimate the project itself withdrew. Press is used here only to locate primary material. Where a claim could only be found in press, it is marked as second-hand or left out. The legal analysis rests on published court opinions and Adobe's own license documents. It is not legal advice, and no court has yet ruled on a clean room run by an AI model.

Label	Definition	How to treat it
FACT	Verifiable in the cited primary source: a filing, press release, official documentation, or standards body announcement.	Reliable as stated. Check the source if the exact wording matters.
VENDOR CLAIM	Reported by a vendor about its own business or product. Self-measured and not audited by any third party.	The vendor said it. Directionally useful, not a measurement. Definitions of the metric are usually undisclosed.
THIRD-PARTY ESTIMATE	A research firm forecast or survey result. Methodology is proprietary and generally not reproducible.	Use for direction and order of magnitude only. Do not build a model on it.
ASSESSMENT	The author's reasoned judgment from the cited evidence. Falsifiable, and the reasoning is shown so it can be argued with.	This is analysis, not reporting. Disagree with it where your evidence differs.
HYPOTHESIS	A proposition offered for testing. Not currently supported by sufficient evidence to assert.	Treat as a research question, not a conclusion. Each one names what would confirm or refute it.
SCENARIO	A structured future state with a stated subjective probability. The probability is the author's judgment, not a calculated figure.	Use the leading indicators attached to each, not the probability. The indicators are observable; the probability is not.

Assumptions this analysis rests on

Four premises are assumed rather than shown. Each paragraph names what fails if the premise is wrong.

One. The public commit history is the real history

Every PhotoCraft commit is dated on or after 30 September 2026, and the first one adds five lines. The report reads that as the start of the work. If substantial code was written elsewhere and pushed in bulk, the eleven-day figure in the title overstates the speed, and the findings on build cost weaken. The structural findings on what was hard to copy do not depend on the speed.

Two. The project's self-grading is honest in direction

The parity documents are written by the project, partly by the same AI model that wrote the code. The report assumes that when they grade themselves down, the downgrade is real. They have done so in public and in writing, which is some evidence of good faith. If the grades are inflated, the apps are further from Adobe than reported, and the call below gets stronger, not weaker.

Three. AI vendors honor their published commercial terms

The section on what founders should stop sharing assumes that Anthropic, OpenAI and Google do what their commercial data terms say. If commercial inputs are in fact used for training, the advice in that section becomes more urgent but does not change in kind.

Four. United States law is the main venue

The legal analysis is mostly American. European Union law treats the right to observe and test software differently and voids some contract terms that American courts enforce. A dispute brought in Europe would weaken the contract-based exposure described below.

The call

ASSESSMENT Closed source no longer protects the half of a product that users can see. ArtCraft copied the visible breadth of Adobe's suite in days, and its own measurements show that the other half, file fidelity, plug-ins and professional depth, gets more expensive the closer anyone looks. That other half is where protection now sits, with data, network effects, contracts and patents. Secret source code is off the list. Founders should price their moat on what a stranger cannot observe, and investors should discount any moat argument that rests on code being hard to write. What would overturn this: any ArtCraft app passing its own beta gate, with its target's native file format reliable, within half a year.

My judgment on the evidence assembled here, nothing more. There is data I can't see and data I may have missed. New evidence can move me, including to the opposite position, and I reserve the right to move.

Executive summary

ArtCraft's release is the clearest public test yet of a question every software company now faces: if a product's behavior is visible, how long does the code behind it stay scarce? The answer from the repositories is that the visible half falls in days and the rest does not. What protects a commercial product is moving from its source code to the things a clone has to earn from users over time.

FINDING 1 About half of Photoshop, by the project's own measure, took eleven days.

FACT PhotoCraft's first commit is dated 30 September 2026. On 10 October its parity document graded it at about 76 percent of Photoshop's features present and about 45 percent ready for real professional work. Across the seven apps, the public repositories recorded 9,390 commits in twelve calendar days, 58 percent of them carrying a Claude co-author line, and drew about 90,000 GitHub stars. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)

FINDING 2 The founder's parity claims and the project's own documents disagree.

VENDOR CLAIM Thomas told Reddit the apps would reach 100 percent parity within a month, then told Hacker News that 99 percent would take months. His project's documents put the apps between 45 and 62 percent ready for real work, and PhotoCraft's estimate of remaining

effort rose roughly fifteenfold in one week once users began filing bugs against features already counted as done. [\[10\]](#) [\[11\]](#) [\[12\]](#) [\[3\]](#)

FINDING 3 The hard half is file fidelity, plug-ins and depth, and users are the ones who find it.

VENDOR CLAIM PhotoCraft reports that it reproduces 52 percent of Photoshop-authored test files exactly, that it cannot host Photoshop's .8BF plug-ins, and that some users report Photoshop refusing files it writes. FilmCraft cannot open Premiere projects. EffectCraft cannot open After Effects projects or run its plug-ins. [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[8\]](#)

FINDING 4 Copyright is Adobe's weakest lever. Contract and patents are stronger.

ASSESSMENT American courts have protected clean-room rebuilds and uncopied menu structures for decades. But Adobe's terms of use define reverse engineering to include monitoring a system's inputs and outputs, two federal circuits have enforced clauses like it, and PhotoCraft's parity document describes inspecting the installed Photoshop bundle and strings in its binary. Adobe holds patents on content-aware fill and has won a jury verdict on a palette patent before. [\[20\]](#) [\[29\]](#) [\[30\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[40\]](#) [\[41\]](#)

FINDING 5 Adobe has said nothing in public, and the project has started stepping back.

FACT No Adobe statement, takedown notice or lawsuit was found as of 11 October 2026. That same day the repository descriptions stopped naming the Adobe products they reimplement, though the READMEs still do. [\[1\]](#) [\[16\]](#) [\[18\]](#)

FINDING 6 Exposure tracks how much of a product's value is visible on screen.

ASSESSMENT Tools whose value is in visible behavior over a published file format, such as PDF editors, developer frameworks and office apps for light users, are the most exposed. Systems of record, regulated software, and products built on proprietary data or a network of users are the least exposed, because a clone copies the interface and starts with none of the rest. [\[38\]](#) [\[45\]](#) [\[47\]](#)

FINDING 7 What founders should guard is the test oracle, not the source.

ASSESSMENT PhotoCraft improves by testing against real Photoshop files and bug reports. The material that most speeds a rebuild is a company's own corpus of real customer files, its test suites, its ranked bug list and its internal specs. Those are what to stop sharing, including with AI tools on consumer plans, where training on inputs is an opt-in setting and feedback can be kept for five years. [\[3\]](#) [\[50\]](#) [\[51\]](#)

What eleven days of commits show

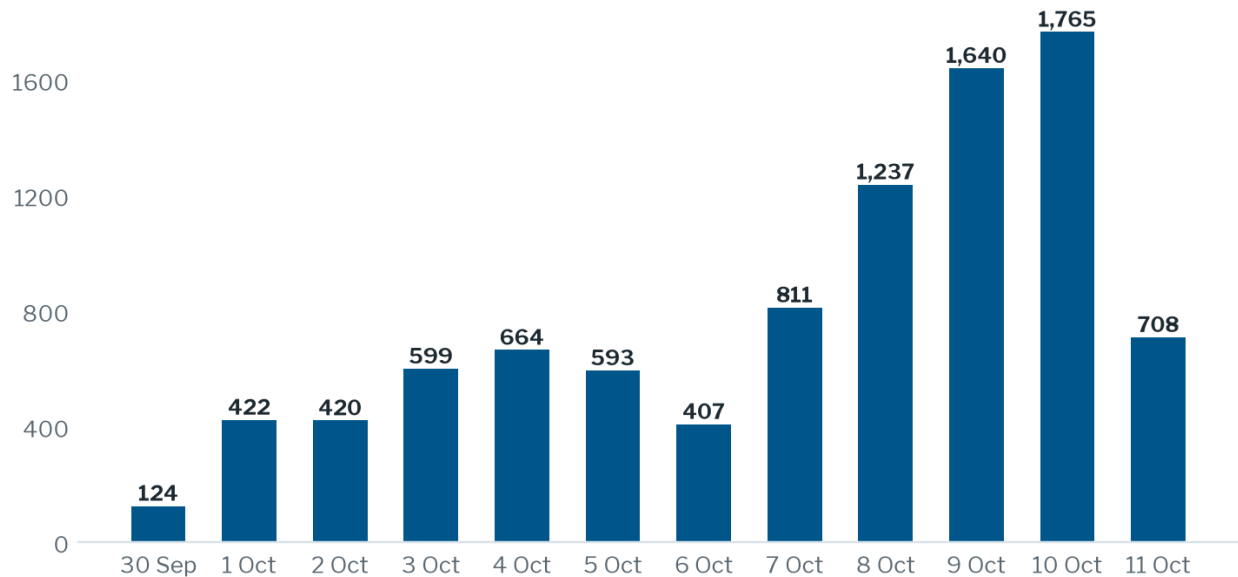
FACT The seven repositories sit in the storytold organization on GitHub, which also holds ArtCraft's earlier work. PhotoCraft, VectorCraft, FilmCraft, LightCraft and PdfCraft were created on 30 September 2026, and EffectCraft and DesignCraft on 1 October. Each README describes the app as an open-source, clean-room reimplementation of a named Adobe product, carries an

early-alpha or alpha status badge, and offers the code under MIT or Apache 2.0 licenses, with builds for macOS, Windows, Linux and, through WebAssembly, the browser. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#)

FACT PhotoCraft's history opens on 30 September with a commit titled "init repo" that adds five lines, followed the same morning by one titled "one-shot". By 11 October the repository held about 20.5 megabytes of Rust source. Thomas wrote on Hacker News that he stopped writing code by hand in February, and that the ArtCraft apps are built with "vanilla Claude Code". He has not published how many model hours or dollars the work consumed, and the author found no figure for it anywhere. [\[1\]](#) [\[13\]](#) [\[14\]](#)

App	Target	Stars	Commits	Contributors	Open issues	Ready for real work (self-graded)
PhotoCraft	Photoshop	46,389	1,487	214	765	~45%
VectorCraft	Illustrator	6,906	2,063	83	93	~62%
FilmCraft	Premiere Pro	9,784	1,382	76	318	~56%
LightCraft	Lightroom	9,919	1,938	104	191	~61%
EffectCraft	After Effects	5,028	1,306	53	188	~45%
DesignCraft	InDesign	2,889	477	31	126	~47%
PdfCraft	Acrobat Pro	9,188	737	124	267	~49%
Total		90,103	9,390		1,948	

GitHub API, 11 October 2026. Contributors include anonymous commit authors. Open issues exclude pull requests. The last column is each project's own estimate from its parity document dated 10 or 11 October, and is a vendor claim.

FIGURE 1 Commits per day across the seven ArtCraft repositories

FACT Commit dates from the GitHub API, UTC. 11 October is a partial day. Commit counts measure activity, not progress: a large share are small fixes, and many come from outside contributors after the press coverage of 7 October. ^[1]

FACT The activity is not one person's anymore. Of 9,390 commits, 5,449 carry a "Co-Authored-By: Claude" trailer and 3,306 are authored under Thomas's name. Commits came from 525 other author names, and the release binaries had been downloaded about 3.07 million times across the seven projects by 11 October. Downloads count files, not people: one user installing on two platforms counts twice. ^[1]

ASSESSMENT The commit curve shows how the work actually got done. The first week is one person directing a model, a few hundred commits a day. The jump after 7 October lines up with PetaPixel's story and the Hacker News thread, and it is mostly other people's fixes. That matters for the protection question. The first half of the work was cheap because one developer and a model could produce it from public material. The second half is being bought with hundreds of volunteers' bug reports and patches, which is a resource most clone attempts will not attract. ^{[16] [12]}

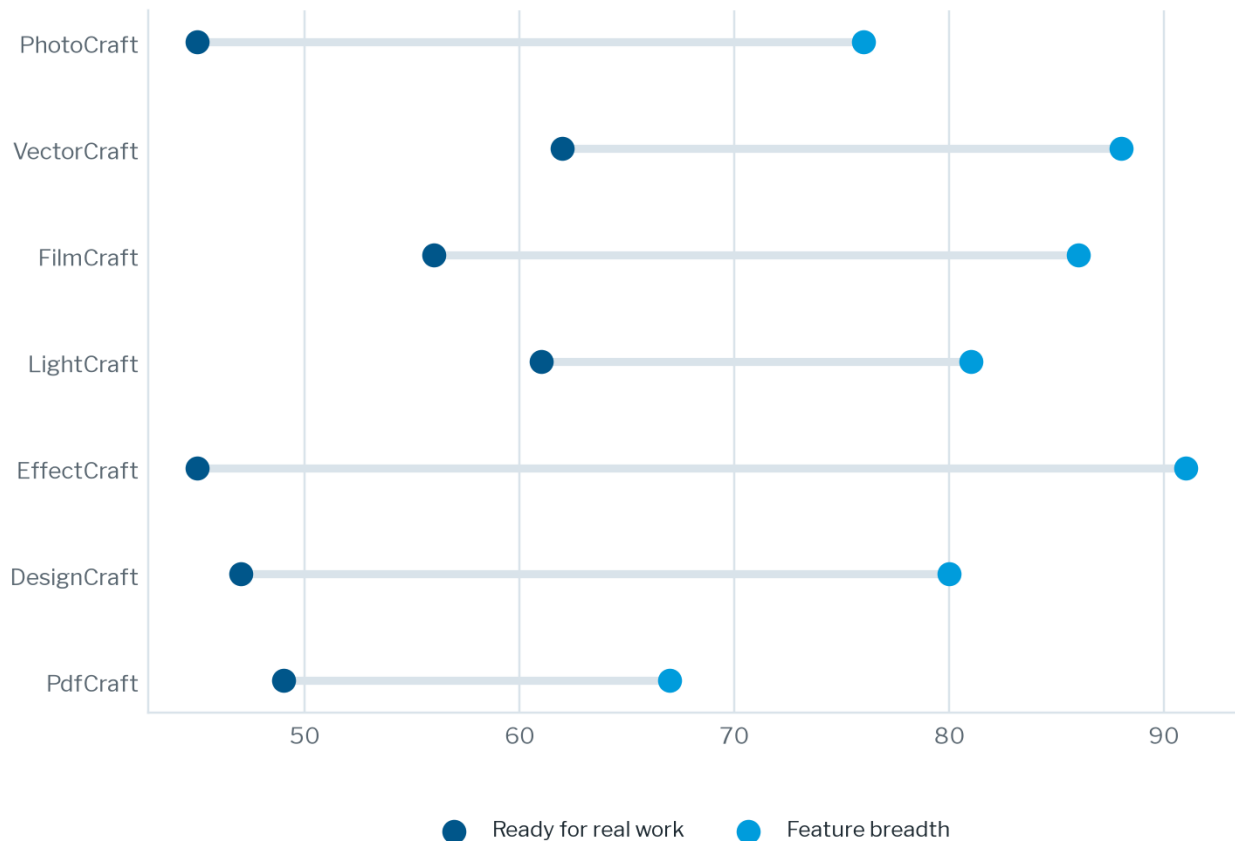
The parity claim, measured against the project's own documents

FACT Thomas announced the apps on Reddit under the account ai_art_is_art on 2 and 3 October. On r/SaaS he wrote that he had "used Opus 5.5 to help me recreate 7 of the top Adobe apps in 100% pure native Rust" and, in a comment, "We're going to reach 100% parity within a month." The r/Adobe version of the post was removed by moderators. On 5 October, answering a Hacker News commenter who quoted those posts back to him, he wrote: "99% parity will take a while, but I'm sure it'll be measured in months and not years. Feel free to check in on this claim. It's measurable." ^{[10] [11] [12]}

ASSESSMENT He is right that it is measurable, and his own repositories have done the measuring. Each project keeps two numbers. Feature breadth asks whether each menu item, tool and format of the Adobe product exists in some form. Readiness asks whether a professional could switch

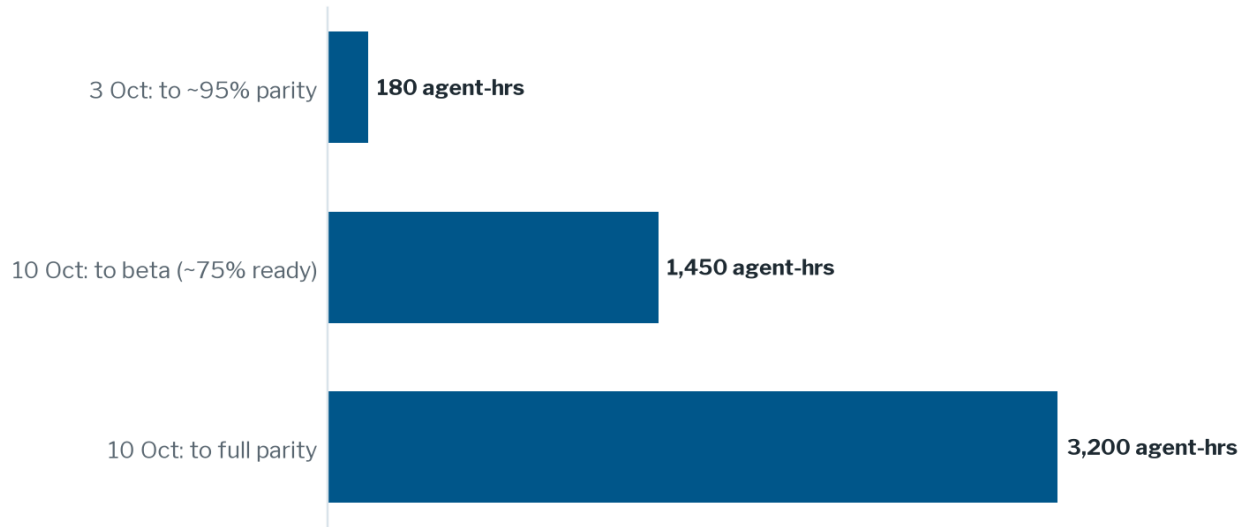
for real work. The gap between them is the gap between what can be seen from outside and what it takes to do the job. [\[3\]](#) [\[7\]](#) [\[8\]](#) [\[9\]](#)

FIGURE 2 Feature breadth against readiness for real work, as each project grades itself



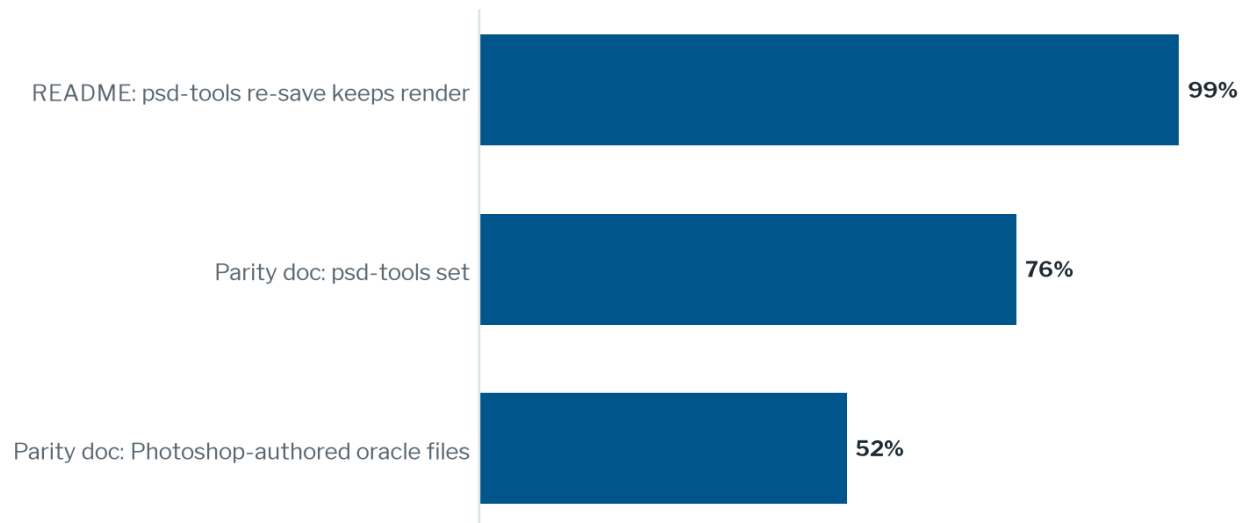
VENDOR CLAIM From each repository's target-app parity document, 10 and 11 October 2026. Self-graded, partly by the same AI model that wrote the code, with written weights but no outside audit. PdfCraft's breadth figure is tier-weighted; LightCraft's is a measured checklist count. [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#) [\[7\]](#) [\[8\]](#) [\[9\]](#)

VENDOR CLAIM PhotoCraft's parity document records its own revision. On 3 October it estimated the app at 82 percent "of the way" and put the remaining work to 95 percent parity at 140 to 220 Opus 5.5 agent-hours. On 10 October it replaced that with 1,100 to 1,800 agent-hours to beta and 2,300 to 4,100 to full parity, and said the earlier estimate "counted feature surface and was far too optimistic". The stated reason: about 1,230 issues filed since the first release, most of them against features already counted as present. [\[3\]](#)

FIGURE 3 PhotoCraft's estimate of remaining work, revised one week apart

VENDOR CLAIM Midpoints of the project's stated ranges (140 to 220, 1,100 to 1,800, 2,300 to 4,100 Opus 5.5 agent-hours). An agent-hour is the project's own unit and is not defined in dollars. The two dates measure different targets, so the ratio is approximate, but the direction is not in doubt. ^[3]

VENDOR CLAIM File fidelity shows the same pattern at a finer grain. PhotoCraft's README says re-saving keeps the render of 307 of the 309 files in the psd-tools test set. Its parity document gives 236 of 309 on the same set by a stricter test, and 133 of 256, or 52 percent, on PSD files authored in Photoshop itself, the project's own oracle corpus. It also records users reporting that Photoshop refuses files PhotoCraft wrote. ^{[2] [3]}

FIGURE 4 Three PhotoCraft measures of PSD fidelity, from the same project

VENDOR CLAIM All three are self-reported on 10 and 11 October 2026. The README figure leads, and it is the least demanding test: it checks that a file the app opens still renders the same after saving. The oracle figure checks against files Photoshop wrote, which is what a working designer's archive is. ^{[2] [3]}

VENDOR CLAIM The other apps document gaps of the same kind. FilmCraft cannot open Premiere's .prproj project files and has no VST3, Audio Units or OpenFX plug-in hosting.

EffectCraft cannot open After Effects .aep projects, and After Effects plug-ins do not run. VectorCraft lists reliable exchange of Illustrator's own .ai files as unfinished. PdfCraft still borrows its page renderer from another crate, cannot reliably edit existing text in CJK and right-to-left scripts, and reports that fuzzing still finds crashes on hostile files. LightCraft lacks measured camera color calibration and Lightroom's plug-in interfaces. [\[4\]](#) [\[8\]](#) [\[7\]](#) [\[6\]](#) [\[5\]](#)

ASSESSMENT Color management, which the brief for any Photoshop rival starts with, is further along than the press suggested. PhotoCraft ships its own ICC engine with soft proofing and all four rendering intents, and grades color management at about 70 percent. What it lacks is Adobe's own CMYK profiles and spot-color plates, which is a print-shop gap, not a hobbyist one. The pattern across every app is the same: the features a person can see in a menu were copied first, and the features that depend on other people's files, other companies' plug-ins and years of edge cases were not. [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#)

What clean room means, and how well it has held up

FACT A clean-room reimplementation separates the people who study the original from the people who write the new code. One team observes the product and writes a functional specification with no protected expression in it. A second team, which has never seen the original code, builds from that specification alone. The method is evidence, not a legal requirement: it exists so that, if sued, the defendant can show that any similarity came from function rather than copying. Phoenix Technologies used it to build an IBM-compatible PC BIOS in 1984, and it became the industry template. [\[33\]](#) [\[37\]](#)

FACT The case law has been friendly to the method and to the copying of function generally. The table lists the decisions most often relied on, with what each holds and what it means for a rebuild like ArtCraft's. [\[23\]](#) [\[24\]](#) [\[25\]](#) [\[26\]](#) [\[27\]](#) [\[28\]](#) [\[29\]](#) [\[30\]](#) [\[31\]](#) [\[32\]](#)

Case	Year	Held	Relevance to an AI rebuild
NEC v. Intel (N.D. Cal.)	1989	Microcode is copyrightable, but NEC did not infringe; a clean-room rewrite showed similarities came from function	The original clean-room vindication
Sega v. Accolade (9th Cir.)	1992	Disassembly to reach unprotected functional elements for compatibility is fair use	Studying a product to copy its function is lawful
Atari v. Nintendo (Fed. Cir.)	1992	Reverse engineering owned chips was lawful; obtaining code by deception and copying beyond need was not	How the inputs were obtained decides the case
Lotus v. Borland (1st Cir.)	1995	A menu command hierarchy is an uncopyrightable method of operation	Copying Photoshop's menus is probably not copyright infringement

Case	Year	Held	Relevance to an AI rebuild
Apple v. Microsoft (9th Cir.)	1994	GUI look and feel gets only thin protection after unprotectable elements are filtered out	Interface similarity alone rarely wins
Sony v. Connectix (9th Cir.)	2000	Intermediate copying to build a competing emulator was fair use	A competing substitute is not automatically market harm
Bowers v. Baystate (Fed. Cir.)	2003	A license clause banning reverse engineering is enforceable and not preempted	Contract can take away what copyright allows
Davidson v. Jung (8th Cir.)	2005	Blizzard's EULA waived the bnetd developers' reverse-engineering rights	Same, applied to a free open-source clone
Google v. Oracle (U.S.)	2021	Reusing Java API declaring code was fair use, partly to preserve programmers' learned skills	Familiar shortcuts and command names have a strong defense
SAS v. World Programming (CJEU)	2012	Functionality, languages and file formats are not protected; a licensee may observe and test, and contracts cannot remove that	In the EU, Adobe's contract lever is weaker

ASSESSMENT On copyright alone, ArtCraft is on solid ground for most of what it copied. Menus, keyboard shortcuts, panel layouts and the PSD format are function or method under Lotus, Apple and Google, and the projects write their own code. The case law turns against a cloner in two places, and both are live here: how the inputs were obtained, and whether the cloner agreed to a contract that gave up the right to obtain them. [\[24\]](#) [\[26\]](#) [\[27\]](#) [\[28\]](#) [\[29\]](#)

Where the AI model breaks the old method

ASSESSMENT The classic clean room depends on a second team that has never seen the original. An AI model is a strange fit for that role. It has been trained on a large slice of the public internet, which includes Adobe's documentation, tutorials, forum posts and, possibly, leaked or decompiled material that no one can enumerate. The model cannot certify what it has seen, and the developer cannot either. That does not make the output infringing. It does mean the evidentiary story a clean room exists to tell is harder to tell. [\[36\]](#) [\[37\]](#)

FACT The open-source world fought over this question in March 2026, when the maintainer of the chardet Python library rewrote it with Claude Code in about five days and moved it off the LGPL onto the MIT license. The original author objected that the maintainers had seen the old code, so the rewrite was not clean. The maintainer cited a similarity check of about 1.3 percent. Heather Meeker, an open-source licensing lawyer, wrote in April that no copyrightable carry-over had been identified and that clean rooms are an evidentiary practice, not a legal requirement. [\[36\]](#) [\[37\]](#)

FACT ArtCraft's own rules contradict each other on what its clean room allows. FilmCraft's contributor rules say never to read, disassemble or copy anything inside Adobe application bundles, "file names and listings only". A VectorCraft commit on 8 October tightened its rule to

"never run, automate or observe Adobe software; behaviour from public docs only". But PhotoCraft's parity document, last updated 10 October, says Photoshop 2026 was installed and "inspected without launching it": its Info.plist document types, its file-format plug-ins' flags, its keyboard-shortcut file, its bundled plug-in list, and "strings in the main binary". Thomas wrote on Hacker News on 10 October that the project does not decompile binaries and works "100% clean room". ^{[4] [61] [3] [14]}

ASSESSMENT Reading strings and configuration files out of an installed app is not decompiling, and copying a shortcut list is probably not copyright infringement after Lotus. But it is the kind of input-gathering Atari lost on, and it sits squarely inside Adobe's contract terms, covered in the next section. The project's later rules suggest its developers have reached the same conclusion. ^{[24] [20]}

Who owns code a model wrote

FACT The US Copyright Office's January 2025 report on AI and copyrightability concluded that prompts alone do not give a user enough control to be the author of the output, though human selection, arrangement and modification can be protected. In March 2025 the D.C. Circuit held in *Thaler v. Perlmutter* that the Copyright Act requires a human author, and the Supreme Court declined to hear the case in March 2026. ^{[34] [35]}

ASSESSMENT This cuts both ways. Code written mostly by a model may carry thin copyright, which weakens the MIT and Apache licenses ArtCraft puts on it, though permissive licenses lose little if they turn out to be partly unenforceable. It also weakens the copyright position of any company whose own product is now mostly model-written. A founder whose moat argument is "our code is copyrighted" should check how much of the code a human actually wrote. ^[34]

Where Adobe can actually reach: contract, patents and trademarks

Contract

FACT Section 17 of Adobe's General Terms of Use, in effect since 3 October 2025, forbids users to reverse engineer the software, and defines that to include "monitoring or tracking the inputs and outputs flowing through a system". It separately forbids decompiling or disassembling, forbids using the software or its outputs to create, train or test machine-learning systems, and says that where local law grants a right to decompile for interoperability, the user must first ask Adobe for the information. ^[20]

ASSESSMENT That clause is the lever most likely to work. A clean room built on observing how Photoshop behaves is close to the definition of monitoring its inputs and outputs. Bowers and Davidson held that such clauses survive in the Federal and Eighth Circuits even where copyright would allow the conduct. The lever only reaches people who accepted Adobe's terms, which every developer who installed Photoshop 2026 to measure it did. The AI-training clause is a second hook: a parity document that grades the clone against Photoshop's behavior could be

read as using Adobe's software to test a system, though the clause is aimed at machine-learning models rather than the code a model writes. In the European Union, SAS limits the clause. [\[20\]](#) [\[29\]](#) [\[30\]](#) [\[31\]](#) [\[3\]](#)

Patents

FACT A clean room does nothing against patents, which protect a method regardless of how the infringer arrived at it. Adobe holds roughly 6,900 US patents by one third-party tally. It has an active patent on low-memory content-aware fill, granted in 2014, with related patents on patch validity. In 2002 a Delaware jury found Macromedia willfully infringed Adobe's patent on tabbed palettes, a user-interface layout, and awarded about \$2.8 million. A separate jury found Adobe infringed Macromedia patents, and the companies settled. [\[44\]](#) [\[40\]](#) [\[41\]](#) [\[42\]](#)

FACT Two Adobe formats come with patent licenses that protect cloners. Adobe's Public Patent License for PDF grants a royalty-free license under the Adobe patent claims a compliant implementation must use, to make and distribute compliant implementations of ISO 32000-1. It does not expressly cover PDF 2.0. The DNG license is also royalty-free for reading and writing the format. The PSD specification, by contrast, contains no patent grant: it is published "for informational use only". [\[38\]](#) [\[39\]](#) [\[59\]](#)

ASSESSMENT Patent exposure falls unevenly across the seven apps. PdfCraft is the safest: it implements a standard Adobe has licensed for free. LightCraft's DNG work is covered. The exposure concentrates in features Adobe invented rather than standardized: content-aware fill and healing, Select Subject, generative tools, After Effects' motion features and specific interface mechanisms of the tabbed-palette kind. PhotoCraft's parity document lists content-aware fill and generative fill as unfinished and notes that some AI features "may be infeasible fully clean-room". The author did not run a freedom-to-operate search. That is the first question for primary research below. [\[38\]](#) [\[39\]](#) [\[40\]](#) [\[3\]](#)

Trademark and trade dress

FACT Every ArtCraft README carries a standard notice that Adobe's product names are Adobe trademarks and that the project is not affiliated with Adobe. PhotoCraft's README promotes the app as "Familiar by design" and says that if you know Photoshop, you already know PhotoCraft. An issue titled "You are asking for lawsuits" was opened on the ArtCraft repository on 9 October, arguing that naming the Adobe products in repository headers would become "Exhibit A". On 11 October the repository descriptions changed to generic wording, such as "an open-source, photo editor written by scratch in pure Rust", while the READMEs kept naming the Adobe products. Separately, a SoundCraft issue flagged that name as already trademarked, and PdfCraft was originally announced as PrintCraft. [\[2\]](#) [\[18\]](#) [\[1\]](#)

ASSESSMENT Naming a competitor to say what your product replaces is generally protected as nominative fair use, and GUI trade dress is hard to hold: the Federal Circuit found Apple's iPhone trade dress functional in 2015. The trademark risk is mainly about the Craft names and any implied endorsement, and it is cheap to fix by renaming. That makes it the most likely first legal contact and the least damaging one. [\[43\]](#)

What Adobe has said

FACT Nothing in public. PetaPixel asked Adobe for comment on 7 October and had no reply at publication. No notice naming the projects appeared in GitHub's public DMCA repository through notices dated 9 October, and the author found no lawsuit or cease-and-desist letter. Adobe's 10-K for fiscal 2025 warns of competition from generative and agentic AI and of "limited barriers to entry", but does not name open-source or free competitors as a risk. [\[16\]](#) [\[22\]](#)

ASSESSMENT Silence is the rational move. A lawsuit would turn a hobby project with a 45 percent readiness grade into a cause, and Adobe's most credible claims, contract and patents, need evidence about how specific features were built, which discovery would provide better than a press release. Adobe also comes to this with little public goodwill on pricing: in March 2026 it agreed to a \$150 million settlement with the Justice Department over hidden early-termination fees and hard cancellation, while denying wrongdoing. Thomas cites those fees as his motive. [\[19\]](#) [\[15\]](#)

Which software is exposed and which is not

FACT ArtCraft is not the only demonstration. In February 2026 a single Cloudflare engineer rebuilt the Next.js API on top of Vite in about a week, for about \$1,100 in Claude tokens, and Cloudflare reported coverage of 94 percent of the Next.js 16 API. The same month, Anthropic described 16 Claude agents writing a 100,000-line C compiler in Rust that builds the Linux kernel, at a cost of about \$20,000. ArtCraft itself added Word, Excel and PowerPoint clones on 7 October, and Thomas has said AutoCAD and SolidWorks are next. [\[45\]](#) [\[46\]](#) [\[17\]](#) [\[60\]](#)

FACT Public markets priced the threat before ArtCraft existed. After Anthropic released Claude Cowork plug-ins on 30 January 2026, Thomson Reuters fell nearly 18 percent on 3 February, its worst day on record, and RELX fell 14 percent. Andreessen Horowitz wrote in March that software ETFs had fallen 30 percent since the start of the year. Bain argued in September 2025 that systems of record hold their position because of "unique data structures, long histories of activity, and built-in regulatory logic". [\[49\]](#) [\[48\]](#) [\[47\]](#)

ASSESSMENT The ArtCraft case suggests a sharper test than any of those. Ask what fraction of a product's value a stranger can observe by using it. Where that fraction is high, a model can copy it. Where the value sits in files other people made, in data the product has accumulated, in other companies' integrations, or in a regulator's approval, the clone gets the interface and starts with none of the rest. The table applies that test to the categories in question. Office documents are a useful middle case: the OOXML format has been a published Ecma standard since 2006, so a clone can read the files, and what protects Microsoft is everything around them. [\[47\]](#) [\[62\]](#)

FACT The protected categories have numbers behind them. Salesforce reported in February 2026 more than 9,000 apps and expert listings on AppExchange, and that 91 percent of its customers use at least one. Figma's S-1 reported 13 million monthly active users in early 2025. Bloomberg describes 350,000 Terminal users. Certified EHR technology is a condition of CMS's Promoting Interoperability program. None of these can be observed into existence by a model. [\[57\]](#) [\[58\]](#) [\[63\]](#) [\[64\]](#)

Category	What a rebuild copies	What still protects it	Exposure
PDF tools	Viewing, forms, annotation, signing	Little: ISO standard with a royalty-free Adobe patent license; cloud document services	High
Developer frameworks and libraries	The full API surface, from docs and tests	Hosting, support, brand; the vinext rebuild took a week	High
Thin workflow SaaS	Forms, approvals, dashboards	Integrations and switching friction only	High
Desktop creative tools	Menus, tools, filters, shortcuts	Native-format fidelity, plug-ins, trained users, Adobe-patented features, licensed content	Medium; high for light users
Office suites	Documents, sheets, slides on OOXML	Real-time collaboration, admin and compliance tooling, enterprise contracts	Medium
CAD and engineering	Drawing and modeling interface	DWG fidelity, geometry kernels, certification, decades of edge cases	Low to medium
Systems of record (CRM, ERP)	Screens and workflows	Customer data, history, AppExchange-scale integration catalogs	Low
Regulated software (EHR, tax)	Screens	Certification, regulatory logic, liability	Low
Data and network products	The terminal or canvas	The data feed or the other users	Low

Exposure ratings are the author's assessment from the evidence in this report, not a measurement.

ASSESSMENT Adobe's own position splits along this line. The parts of its suite that are pure visible behavior over open formats, PDF viewing and editing and basic photo work, are the exposed parts, and they are also where ArtCraft's essentials-tier readiness grades are highest. Adobe's revenue is still growing: it reported \$6.76 billion for its third fiscal quarter of 2026, up 13 percent, before ArtCraft launched. The parts that protect Adobe are PSD and .aep files in customers' archives, the plug-in market, Firefly's licensed training content, and patents on features it invented. Those are also the parts ArtCraft's own documents list as missing. [\[21\]](#) [\[38\]](#) [\[3\]](#)

What a founder should stop sharing

FACT Trade-secret law already draws the line this section follows. Under the Defend Trade Secrets Act, information is a trade secret only if its owner takes reasonable measures to keep it secret and it is not readily ascertainable by proper means, and reverse engineering is expressly a proper means. Whatever a product shows to any user was never a trade secret, and now it is cheap to copy as well. [\[56\]](#)

ASSESSMENT The ArtCraft repositories show what actually speeds a rebuild once the visible behavior is copied: test oracles. PhotoCraft measures itself against a corpus of Photoshop-authored files, public PSD test sets and Adobe's published file specification, and its fastest progress came from users filing 1,230 issues with real files attached. A company's own versions

of those things, its corpus of real customer files, its regression suite, its ranked bug list, its edge-case notes and its internal specifications, are the shortest path from a demo-grade clone to a usable one. Those are what to guard. [\[3\]](#) [\[59\]](#)

Stop sharing	Why it matters now	What to do instead
Real customer files and test corpora	They are the oracle that turns a demo clone into a working one; PhotoCraft's PSD gap is a corpus gap	Share synthetic fixtures; keep real files behind NDA and access logs
Full internal specs and format docs	A published spec is a build plan; the PSD spec is one of PhotoCraft's main sources	Publish what interoperability needs and stop there
Ranked bug lists and known-gap notes	They tell a cloner where the hard half is and what users notice	Keep them internal; publish fixed issues, not open ones
Source, schemas and prompts pasted into consumer AI accounts	Anthropic's consumer plans can train on inputs if the user opts in, with five-year retention; Samsung staff leaked source to ChatGPT in 2023	Use commercial or enterprise terms only, and enforce it with SSO
Thumbs-up and bug-report feedback to AI vendors	Even under Anthropic's commercial terms, explicit feedback can be used for training and kept five years	Turn feedback off at the organization level where the plan allows it
Architecture detail in vendor support and office-hours sessions	No vendor policy found covers these sessions specifically; they are human conversations with note-takers	Treat them as disclosures: NDA, minimum detail, no screenshares of internals

FACT The vendor terms behind those rows are specific. Anthropic says it will not use inputs or outputs from its commercial products for training by default, except where a user explicitly reports feedback, which can be kept for up to five years. Its consumer plans, including Claude Code on those plans, can be used for training if the user allows it, with five-year retention, or 30 days if not. OpenAI does not train on API data by default and keeps abuse-monitoring logs up to 30 days unless the law requires longer, which in 2025 it did: a court order in the New York Times case required OpenAI to preserve output logs until September 2025. Google may use content sent to unpaid Gemini API services to improve its products, and human reviewers may read it.

[\[50\]](#) [\[51\]](#) [\[52\]](#) [\[53\]](#) [\[54\]](#) [\[55\]](#)

ASSESSMENT Two cautions keep this advice proportionate. First, the AI vendor is rarely the threat. Under commercial terms the larger leak is staff using personal accounts, and the larger copier is anyone with a subscription to the product. Second, secrecy has a cost. Interoperability, a public API and documentation win customers, and a company that hides everything to slow a clone also slows its own adoption. The goal is to publish behavior freely and hold back the oracle.

[\[50\]](#) [\[51\]](#)

Scenarios to October 2027

The probabilities are subjective and are the least reliable content in this report. The earliest visible signs are the useful part: each can be checked from public sources without private information.

SCENARIO A Alpha for a long time 40 percent

Commits slow as press attention fades. Breadth keeps climbing, but readiness for professional work stays under 60 percent for the flagship apps because native-format fidelity and plug-ins resist the method.

Consequence. The apps take hobbyists, students and light users. Adobe's professional base is unaffected, and the case becomes evidence that the hard half of software is still hard.

Earliest visible sign. Daily commits across the seven repos under 300 for a month, and readiness grades unchanged across two re-measures.

SCENARIO B The light-user tier goes 35 percent

Two or three apps, most likely LightCraft, PdfCraft and VectorCraft, pass their own beta gate for light users. Distribution through Linux repositories and browsers follows.

Consequence. Pressure lands on Adobe's cheapest plans and on Acrobat's basic tier, and on every paid app whose users need only the visible half. Adobe answers with price or free features rather than lawyers.

Earliest visible sign. A beta release tag on any of the seven repositories, or Adobe adding free capability to its entry plans.

SCENARIO C Legal friction 20 percent

Adobe, Microsoft or Autodesk sends trademark or terms-of-use letters, or a patent notice on a specific feature. The projects rename, drop the Adobe product names and remove features under challenge.

Consequence. Development continues under new names but loses momentum and some contributors. The case becomes the first test of contract and patent levers against an AI-built clone.

Earliest visible sign. A notice naming story told in GitHub's DMCA repository, a rename of any Craft app, or removal of the Adobe product names from the READMEs.

SCENARIO D Professional parity 5 percent

PhotoCraft reaches its beta gate with reliable PSD exchange and hosts third-party plug-ins within the year.

Consequence. Code stops being a moat for any desktop software whose formats are documented, and Adobe's moat narrows to content, cloud services and patents.

Earliest visible sign. PhotoCraft's Photoshop-authored oracle score above 90 percent, and .8BF hosting merged.

Leading indicators

If this happens	It means	Where to watch
Readiness grades rise faster than breadth	The hard half is yielding to the method; moves toward B or D	Each repo's docs/target-app-parity.md
PhotoCraft's oracle PSD score passes 75 percent	Native-format fidelity, the strongest moat, is eroding	PhotoCraft parity document, file formats row
Any plug-in hosting merges (.8BF, OpenFX, VST3)	The plug-in moat is being bridged; moves toward D	Closed pull requests in photocraft and filmcraft
A DMCA, trademark or patent notice appears	Adobe has chosen the legal route; moves toward C	github.com/github/dmca; repo issues
Adobe cuts entry-plan prices or adds free features	The light-user tier is being defended; consistent with B	Adobe pricing pages; quarterly earnings calls
Commits fall below 300 a day for a month	Volunteer energy has faded; moves toward A	GitHub commit history

Implications

For founders and CTOs

ASSESSMENT Assume a competent stranger with a model can reproduce your product's visible behavior in weeks, and plan as if one already has. Then list what they would still lack. If the list is short, the moat is short, and the remedy is to build things that cannot be observed: accumulated customer data, integrations other companies maintain, a file format your customers' archives depend on, certification, or a network of users. Guard the oracle described above. Read your own AI vendor terms, move every developer onto commercial or enterprise accounts, and turn off feedback sharing where the plan allows. If your product is now mostly model-written, do not rely on copyright in the code as a defense. Patents on the methods you genuinely invented, and license terms your users accept, are the legal tools that still work against a clean-room rebuild.

[20] [29] [50] [56]

ASSESSMENT There is an opportunity in the same evidence. ArtCraft's cost to build the first half was low enough that a small team can now target an incumbent's light-user tier directly, as Thomas did. A founder whose product competes with a dominant suite on visible behavior has never had cheaper engineering, and should expect the incumbent to respond with price, as Adobe's March settlement suggests it has room to do on fees. [19]

For investors

ASSESSMENT Discount any moat argument that rests on the effort it took to write the code. Engineering headcount, lines of code and years of development are now weak evidence of defensibility. Ask instead what share of the product's value a user can see, and what share sits in

data, integrations, formats, certification or users. Price the first share as replicable within a quarter. For incumbents, the ArtCraft case argues against a sell-off on the clone news alone: the hard half is the part that generates professional revenue, and Adobe's third-quarter growth came before the clone and is not yet testable against it. Watch the readiness grades and the oracle scores. They are public, they are dated, and they will show the moat narrowing before any revenue line does. ^[21] ^[3]

What this document cannot answer

Several questions need primary research the author could not do from public sources.

Freedom to operate. Which Adobe patents, by number, read on specific PhotoCraft, EffectCraft or LightCraft features? That needs a patent search and claim charts by a patent attorney, not a reading of press releases.

Build cost. How many model hours and dollars did the first eleven days take? Thomas has not said. A credible number would turn the speed finding into a cost finding, which is what investors actually need.

Model exposure. Did the model that wrote the code see any Adobe source, decompiled material or leaked SDKs in training? Neither the developer nor the model can answer this, and no court has decided who bears the risk.

User switching. How many of the roughly 3 million downloads became regular use, and by whom? Only telemetry the projects do not collect, or a user survey, would answer it.

Adobe's intent. Whether Adobe is silent by choice, preparing action, or treating the projects as noise is not knowable from outside.

Rebuild cost in other categories. The exposure table is reasoned from mechanism. A controlled rebuild attempt against a system of record or a CAD tool would test it directly.

Half-life of this assessment

Different claims here decay at very different rates. A reader returning later should discount them accordingly.

Weeks. Star counts, commit counts, issue counts, readiness grades and the PSD fidelity scores. These change daily; re-pull them from the repositories before quoting any of them.

Six months. The scenario probabilities, Adobe's silence, the repository names and descriptions, and the absence of a legal action. The first beta tag or the first legal notice will move several of these at once.

Twelve to twenty-four months. The AI vendors' data terms, which have changed roughly yearly, the exposure ratings by category, and the size of the gap between visible breadth and professional readiness as models improve.

Architectural. The case law on clean rooms, menus, interfaces and license clauses; the trade-secret rule that reverse engineering is a proper means; the PDF and DNG patent licenses; and the central argument that what users can observe cannot be kept secret. These change only through new appellate decisions or legislation.

Limitations

This report is independent. The author has no commercial relationship with Adobe, ArtCraft, Anthropic, OpenAI, Google or any company named here, and was not paid by any party to write it. The author uses Anthropic's Claude in his own work, and Claude is the model at the center of the case; readers should weigh that.

The readiness and fidelity figures are self-reported by the project and graded partly by the same model that wrote the code. They are the best numbers available and are labeled accordingly, but they are not independent measurements, and the author did not install or test the apps against Adobe's products.

Commit and contributor counts are approximate. Author names are not identities, so the count of other contributors may include one person under several names or bots. Download counts are file downloads, not users.

Reddit posts were read from archived copies because the live pages block scripted access, and one post has since been removed by moderators. Hacker News comments were read from the site's public search API. Quotes were checked against those copies, not against the live pages.

The legal analysis is a non-lawyer's reading of published opinions and license documents. Some summaries of the European SAS decision and the Phoenix BIOS history come from secondary sources and are labeled that way in the source list. Nothing here is legal advice.

The category exposure table is the author's assessment. It is reasoned from the ArtCraft evidence and a handful of other cases, not from a survey or a measured sample of rebuild attempts.

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