Barriers and Advantages to Open Sourcing Software

To Open Source or Not to Open Source

A dilemma faced by corporations of corporate workers — Should we keep code proprietary or open source it?

• What are the arguments against?
• What are the arguments for?
• Why you should care as future employees
Barriers to Open Sourcing

In no particular order:

• **Liability** — What if there are bugs? Are we exposing ourselves to liability by allowing others to use our code? Do we need to get lawyers involved?

• **Negative PR** — What if our code becomes part of a security breach, or is used for something unsavory? What if we fail along the line and embarrass ourselves?

• **Retaliation** — What if tech vendors look unfavorably on our entering the tech market?

• **Getting locked out** — If we open our software, can we be locked out of our own IP?

• **License pollution** — If we open source some, do we have to open source the rest?

• **Competition** — Are we letting competitors benefit from the investments we have made?

• **Giving up revenue** — Could this be turned into a revenue stream at some point?

• **Ongoing commitment** — Are we committing to supporting a product in perpetuity?

Critical Question

Is the software in question part of your “secret sauce” or what differentiates you from your competitors?

• If yes — you may not want to open source it

• If part of your infrastructure — Few downsides to open sourcing code

Is your solution different/better than existing open source solutions?

• If yes — Good candidate

• If no — Why are you not migrating to the better solution?

  • Governance, technical or other issues with competing project?
    • If yes — go ahead and share your project
  • Overhead involved in switching
    • Misery loves company..?
Advantages to Open Sourcing

• Set the standard
• Increase platform adoption
  • Reduce costs
  • Better code
  • Extended features
  • Extend technical team
• Attract and retain top talent
• Adopt best-practices
• Professional development for employees
• Build technical good-will
• Revenue: Software vs. Services

What are the Steps?

• Choosing a license
  • Stay mainstream (OSI approved)
  • Permissive vs. non-permissive?
  • Commercial use?
  • Jurisdiction
  • Patents & IP
  • Attribution vs no promotion
• Code review
  • Best practices
  • IP issues
  • Make code available
  • Leverage existing foundations & organizations
  • Do not abandon your code
  • Promote
  • Build good governance
  • Build community
Pitfalls: Unrealistic Expectations

• Abandon-ware
• Despotic rule
• Immediate savings on IT
• Wild overnight success

Why Promoting Open Source Matters to You!

• Career development
• Skill development
• Networking
• Leadership development
• Educating your own Org.