

URL: https://ecorner.stanford.edu/?post_type=snippet&p=56196

3DR's Chris Anderson talks about the importance of structuring open-source projects, like the drone-maker community he helped start, in a way that they can be commercialized later, if that's the ultimate goal. He explains how businesses, because of proprietary concerns, avoid software created under open-source licenses that require all derivative work be published for the sake of engaging more developers.



Transcript

- When you're doing open source, it's really important to structure the open source project both in terms of it's governing structure and it's license in a way that can be commercialized.. If that's what you ultimately aim to do.. So, normally when you look at the continuum of open innovation it starts with things like, App Stores, APIs, SDKs, except when you go into actual open source software there's a bunch of licenses.. As a general sense, the more copy left, the more radical the license, the better it is.. The GPL V3 is the most radical of the licenses.. In 2009, when we were setting up the license, we had these community members who were amazing developers.. Just the best I've seen.. But they were open source zealots.. I'm an open source zealot, or so I thought.. They were like, "GPL V3 is the most viral, "it will get the most developer engagement..

"People are required, when they use this, to give back." I'm like, "That sounds good.. That definitely "spurs developer engagement." I hadn't thought about what else that might mean.. It turns out that GPL V3, and this is super controversial and I'm gonna get shot for this, metaphorically.. The GPL V3 is a crisis in the open source community.. It has essentially been banned, by all big companies.. I would go so far as to say, it is toxic for business.. I think it is fantastic for developers.. Because of it's viral nature, every time you change the software you must publish it.. It discourages companies from using it because it can infect everything else with this, force to expose your IP.. As a result, nobody will touch it any more..

Now, this is not to be confused with the GPL V2, which is what Linux is.. GPL V3 was a quite extreme deviation of it.. It think that fissure in the open source software community is going to be felt for years.. I made the wrong bet.. I went GPL V3 with RG pilot, and as a result, once we decided to commercialize it, no one would touch it.. We fortunately had another group, called PX4, based out of ETH in Zurich, another University.. They had chosen the BSD license.. This one here is copy left, and this one is permissive, the BSD license.. The BSD license is also completely open source, but you don't have to distribute if you make modifications.. You can choose to, but you don't have to..

The BSD, the permissive licenses, are the ones the companies embrace.. So we have to divorce.. One community went off GPL and they're doing great.. Fantastic software, fantastic community, but really hard to commercialize.. We created a new, a competing stack, on the BSD license.. That's the one that's now going to be used by most companies, including Air Taxis.. For example the New You Air Taxi course is based on this stack, the drone code stack, which is BSD license.. That was super painful.. I had to be a complete jerk, and essentially fire the community I started, because I made a mistake on my license.. I don't feel good about it, but it had to be done..

I think that is something that we learned a lot about over the last few years, about the differences between those licenses...