

Chapter 3:

Playing the victim--

Show the world that too much freedom hurts development

With billions of people relying on software every day, letting just anybody write code is like putting small children behind the wheel of a car. Quality software requires quality control, and this is best left to professionals.

Up to a point, if professional developers want to make use of the growing number of people interested in producing rough sketches of functioning software, we could exploit “crowd-sourced” codebases if we are willing to supervise and make certain that nobody hurts themselves with a keyboard. The important thing is that they're working for us-- and on our terms.

Moving towards the world mentioned in the previous chapter will help, where every free software distributor that's large enough “confesses” inquisition-like, that the software they wrote is actually ours. We still need to demonstrate ownership by moving their codebases onto our own servers. With the acquisition of Github, Microsoft has demonstrated to the press, to developers and to the rest of the world just how much free software they own (or at least control.)

Microsoft Github will bring all software development that much closer to a world where not only is there a computer on every desk, as Bill Gates once put it-- but where there is a Microsoft developer sitting at that desk. You didn't work for them a year ago, but congratulations-- **you do now**.

And it would be great if we could say that every developer is a Microsoft developer, for one because it would mean there is no competition at all. It would be great if when people stopped developing software for the largest and most powerful software company, they stopped developing altogether-- because without the largest company with the best developers, how else can we weed out quality issues like the concerns Apple has with dangerous battery-charging software, or network security issues in the workplace?

Without control, there is chaos. Even when a competing developer makes a terrible mistake-- it hurts people's trust in the digital connectivity and surveillance we want to put in every home, car, phone, wristwatch, pacemaker, thermostat, doorbell, front lock, pedometer, camera, speaker, television, refrigerator, dishwasher, power meter, radio, and e-book reader, for starters.

If we want to sell the internet of things, we can't have people thinking that a bunch of amateurs are creating their software-- we want them to know that everything is under control.

Over the years, we have had great success getting people to accept subscriptions instead of purchases-- the world remembers Steve Ballmer with derision, but if he accomplished one invaluable thing during his time at Microsoft it was the transition from software in boxes to the subscription model. Today with Windows 10, that model is now realized.

A lot of people think that a subscription model is just about charging people over and over again for something they already bought legally. This is definitely one of the nice things about the new way of doing business with software, but there is a more important angle-- we basically "own" (at least control) every machine that uses this model. You can't buy that level of control, you have to fool millions and then billions of customers into trusting you with it.

In some ways, Apple has had greater success with the subscription model than even Microsoft. Leading the way with songs that you had to buy again for every three devices you listened to them on (even if they caved into consumer demand about that later) they still control customers' copies of films and books.

And this is one more reason that we don't want software to be free and controlled by the user: if the user controls their files and programs, they can also copy media that the film industry and e-book publishers want to control after purchase.

By allying with the media companies and major publishers, we have an additional source of revenue that not only gives us an industry we can first tap into and then gradually become its vendors, we have yet another contemporary reason to control users' computers after they purchase them with our software.

"This is great," you say, "but how do we get customers to think of proprietary software this way?"

The answer is that we do it with guilt trips, with lobbying and public-service-like advertising, and (though it's a subject for a later chapter) by working with schools to indoctrinate students with our pro-monopoly point of view. We make certain that if someone says "Wouldn't it be nice if all software were free?"-- whether they're in a classroom or an online chat or their own dinner table, that someone is ready to make them feel stupid for even suggesting it-- try it with your own family, and see what they say. Chances are, it's something we told them.

However, if your intention is to lead customers by the nose, then you don't just want to come off as self-righteous. You want to actually make the people who differ from you look like worse people. And the way to do that is to play the victim.

You're not "being greedy and only caring about profit"-- you're "struggling to survive as a company in unsure times." You're not trying to control the lives of your customers for your own selfish reasons-- you're trying to protect not only a wonderful business model that ensures high-quality software and tools and services for your customers; you're doing it to protect *the customers themselves*.

When other people attack your company, you know, they're really attacking everything good about software (including security.) By trying to stop you from delivering the highest quality software on the market, they are not just ensuring their own suffering; they are ensuring that everyone (the entire market) suffers.

If you are stopped from doing what you do, for whatever reason you think is best, the cost is to the economy, the well-being of millions of people, and the entire industry-- not just your company. What they are doing by standing in your way, is being selfish and destructive and greedy. What you are doing by offering the best proprietary software that keeps tabs on your customers-- is keeping the world turning. Who would want to interfere with that?

Once you've made it clear though, that whatever you *need to do* for the good of humanity itself is exactly what you're going to do, and that anybody that disagrees is just trying to stand in your way and destroy your company (the best company there is-- that's the reason why it's so giant!) Then you can play their little game and say you're doing it just to show them how it's *supposed to be* done--

Just like invading a backwards country and then bringing in construction companies to rebuild when the war is over, after we have declared war on free software and asserted our reasons for taking control back for ourselves-- we can make "peace" and be "friends" who work *together*... if it's on the terms that we set for them.

After all, what good are friendships if you can't exploit them?

Relevant quotes from the Halloween documents:

"the intrinsic parallelism and free idea exchange in OSS has benefits that are not replicable with our current licensing model and therefore present a long term developer mindshare threat."

"De-commoditizing' protocols means reducing choice, raising prices, and suppressing competition."

"somebody might spend money on a non-MS - product"

"MS might lose its monopoly position"

“people might actually write software for a non-MS product. “

“Microsoft perceives a product to be a 'threat' if it presents itself as any of these”

“Because derivatives of Linux MUST be available through some free avenue, it lowers the long term economic gain for a minority party with a forked Linux tree.”

“What the author is driving at is nothing less than trying to subvert the entire 'commodity network and server' infrastructure (featuring TCP/IP, SMTP, HTTP, POP3, IMAP, NFS, and other open standards) into using protocols which, though they might have the same names, have actually been subverted into customer- and market-control devices for Microsoft...”

“The ‘folding extended functionality’ here is a euphemism for introducing nonstandard extensions (or entire alternative protocols) ...even though they're closed, undocumented or just specified enough to create an illusion of openness... while simultaneously making the writing of third-party symbiotes for Microsoft programs next to impossible.”

“We've seen Microsoft play this game before, and they're very good at it. When it works, Microsoft wins a monopoly lock.”

From <https://antitrust.slated.org/halloween/halloween1.html>

“One 'blue sky' avenue that should be investigated is if there is any way to turn Linux into an opportunity for Microsoft.”

“A more generalized assessment of how to beat the Open Source Software process which begat Linux is contained in the 'Open Source Software' document.”

“Systematically attacking UNIX in general helps attack Linux in particular.”

From <https://antitrust.slated.org/halloween/halloween2.html>

“no intellectual property protection means that the deep investments needed by the industry in infrastructure will gravitate to other business models.”

From <https://antitrust.slated.org/halloween/halloween3.html>

“For Microsoft (or at least its present business model) to survive, open source must die. It's a lot like the Cold War was; peaceful coexistence could be a stable solution for us, but it can never be for them, because they can't tolerate the corrosive effect on their customer relationships of comparisons with a more open system.”

“Expect Microsoft to ally even more closely with the RIAA and MPAA in making yet another try at hardware-based DRM restrictions — and legislation making them mandatory. The rationale will be to stop piracy and spam, but the real goal will be customer control and a lockout of all unauthorized software.”

“I also expect a serious effort, backed by several billion dollars in bribe money (oops, excuse me, campaign contributions), to get open-source software outlawed on some kind of theory that it aids terrorists.”

From <https://antitrust.slated.org/halloween/halloween11.html>

About the author:

Ted MacReilly is a technologist and tech writer concerned with modern trends in software design and development. He does not work for Microsoft, Apple, or Google, but would like them to continue offering proprietary software and cloudware, without getting too cozy with free software developers.

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