

Grafana Labs becomes the latest open source firm to change its licensing

Grafana, Loki and Tempo move to AGPLv3 - but for once AWS is not to blame

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Grafana Labs, the company set up to commercialise the Grafana analytics and visualization project has become the latest open source firm to adopt more restrictive licensing for its core products.

Unlike Elastic, MongoDB, Redis Labs and others, the company has not "rolled its own" licensing, as with MongoDB's Server Side Public Licence (SSPL), which is not recognised by the Open Source Institute (OSI). Instead, it has moved some of its products, including Grafana, Loki and Tempo, from the permissive Apache 2.0 to the more restrictive AGPLv3. Grafana Enterprise and Grafana Cloud products continue to be offered under a commercial licence and plugins, agents and some libraries will remain under the Apache licence.

AGPLv3 requires developers who use the licensed code to also release the modifications under the same licence. The source code must be made available when the licensed material is distributed and when a modified version is used to provide a service over a network, the complete source code of the modified version must be made available.

In a [blog post](#), co-founder and CEO Raj Dutt said Grafana "has always tried to balance the 'value creation' of open source and community with the 'value

capture' of our monetisation strategy".

He continued: "While AGPL doesn't 'protect' us to the same degree as other licences (such as the SSPL), we feel that it strikes the right balance. Being open source will always be at the core of who we are, and we believe that adopting AGPLv3 allows our community and users to by and large have the same freedoms that they have enjoyed since our inception."

In a [Q&A](#), Dutt said the company had looked at the SSPL but wanted to keep Grafana Labs software under OSI-approved licences, "because the support of the open source community is very important to us."

It is unclear exactly what triggered the change. In the Q&A Dutt writes simply "the time felt right."

Other companies that have moved recently to more restrictive terms, typically ISVs that contribute the majority of the work to the code, did so after accusing cloud firms, particularly AWS, of using their code for their own versions and not putting enough back in terms of the community, but Dutt described AWS as a strategic partner and said that Amazon Managed Service for Grafana (AMG) customers would not be affected.

See also: [Elastic has stretched the patience of many in open source - but is there room for a third way?](#)

Amanda Brock, CEO of [OpenUK](#), a charity that campaigns for open source adoption, said she was pleased to see the company choose an open source licence and felt that Dutt's words show support and respect for the community.

"Anyone modifying Grafana's code must share it back. Their CEO's Q&A is well-prepared and well-informed and Grafana is actually doubling down on open source. Of course, we are all now awaiting the mentioned update on the contributor licence agreement, and hope to see a CLA that continues to respect open source in the tone of the Q&A shared and is not a back door to proprietary licensing in the future."

Brock said the move looks less reactive than with previous changes. "For once AWS is not being blamed for a licence change. Grafana's 2020 revenue share deal with AWS is called out as a 'strategic' partnership and unlike Elastic they are positive about AWS, who were famously accused of strip mining small tech companies in the past."

However, she sounded a note of caution about the future direction: "I am slightly concerned that the revenue sharing model, pioneered in 2019 by Google and picked up by AWS is discretionary on the part of the cloud provider, but do feel that for now, in the existing model of cloud, the way forward for open source providers."

Peter Zaitsev, CEO at database consultancy Percona, also welcomed the fact that the company chose a licence recognised by the OSI. Referencing the amount of capital the company is estimated to have raised since its 2014 launch, he tweeted: "Raising \$75M+ is not easily compatible with permissive licence for core product. I'm glad they chose AGPLv3 vs SSPL and friends though. At least Grafana remains open source!"



Grafana, Loki, and Tempo will be relicensed to AGPLv3
We believe that this change allows our community and users to have the same core freedoms of free and open...
grafana.com

9:18 PM · Apr 20, 2021



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However, there were dissenting voices. Co-founder of Prometheus, Julian Voltz, said (referring to Grafana's roots as a fork of Kibana) tweeted.

"If it had been AGPL to begin with, it would have never reached the success and adoption that it now has in the first place."



Julius Volz @juliusvolz · Apr 21, 2021



Replying to @alexellisuk @discordianfish and 2 others

Of course. And I can't blame any company for generally putting things under more restrictive licenses. I am doing some closed source myself. But what I don't like is using the community under Apache-2 to grow your product, then doing the unexpected switch.



Julius Volz
@juliusvolz

If it had been AGPL to begin with, it would have never reached the success and adoption that it now has in the first place.

8:55 AM · Apr 21, 2021



1 [Copy link to Tweet](#)

While **others** said noted many companies are wary of allowing developers to use AGPL-licensed code for fear of falling foul of its terms.