

Someone has to pay to keep the lights so data-viz outfit Grafana switches licence regime to AGPLv3

AWS dodges the finger of blame as another open-sourcer tightens things up

[Richard Speed](#) Wed 21 Apr 2021 // 12:45 UTC

Data visualisation biz Grafana is switching its licence model from Apache 2.0 to the Affero General Public License (AGPL) v3.

The decision, [announced](#) this morning by CEO and co-founder Raj Dutt, was made as the company continues balancing the "value creation" of its open-source community and the "value capture" of monetisation. Somebody, after all, has to pay to keep the lights on.

"The choice of license is a key pillar of this strategy, and is something that we've deliberated on extensively since the company began," he said.

It's a difficult balance to maintain, and Grafana has looked on as other open-source companies fiddled with their licence regime. Fed up with certain cloud providers flogging hosted versions of its wares, database outfit

MongoDB [rolled out the Server Side Public License \(SSPL\) in 2018](#). Elastic (whose products include Elasticsearch and Kibana) [followed suit in 2021](#).

Grafana, on the other hand, has been a little more cautious and steered away from a non-OSI-approved source-available licence in favour of AGPLv3. The change will therefore not afford the same "protection" as that given by the SSPL but it would mean users must share modified source code.

Percona CEO and co-founder Peter Zaitsev expressed relief at the choice and noted that fundraising activities did not necessarily sit well with an overly permissive licence.

Others [worried](#) that the change was the start of a slippery slope and some [expressed concern](#) about the impact of the change on Apache2-licensed projects.

[In a Q&A on the topic](#) Grafana fleshed out some of the details. "Plugins, agents, and certain libraries will remain Apache-licensed," it said.

As for AWS and its Amazon Managed Service for Grafana (AMG), Grafana described AWS as "a strategic partner" and stated that AMG customers would not be impacted by the change. "We hope that other XaaS providers follow AWS's lead in working with open-source software companies in similarly sustainable ways," it added, a nod toward the fact that people needed to be paid for their

work.

Amanda Brock, CEO at OpenUK, was positive about the change, describing it as well managed and keeping Grafana "in the parameters of open source," although she sounded a faint note of caution on the Contributor License Agreement (CLA), commenting that she hoped "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."

"For once," she added, "AWS is not being blamed for a licence change!"

With a large chunk of the cloud being built on open-source software, the challenge of ensuring that revenues do not simply tumble into the pockets of the cloud giants without alienating the community behind that software is problematic.

Grafana's choice of AGPLv3 might therefore be a more palatable approach to the community than the alternative.

®

Sponsored: [How backup modernization changes the ransomware game](#)