

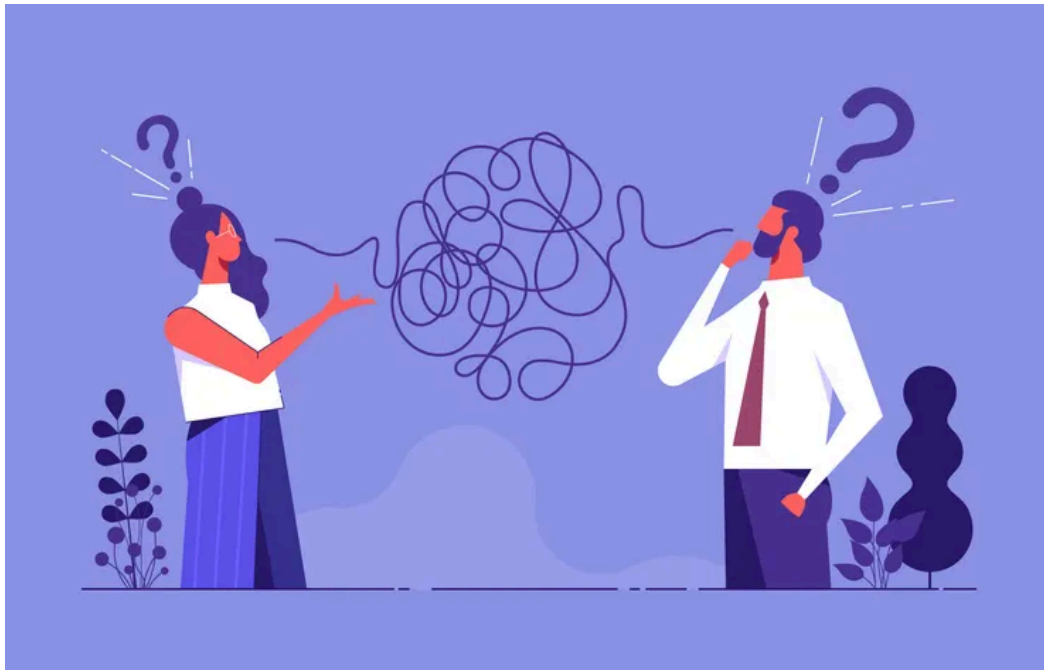
'Open source is not a business model': How companies misunderstand open source

OpenUK CEO calls for end to open source bait and switch

Amanda Brock

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The **dust-up** between (formerly) open source database Redis and its fork, Valkey, highlights the fundamental difference between what businesses want and what open source actually is, says Open UK's Amanda Brock.

Open source is not a business model. This has been confused by those who have tried to use it as such without having worked out how they will monetise it.

In some cases, they have chosen open source to create mass adoption - its benefit and the bait - but are not prepared to pay the price, which is that you effectively enable your competitors with your innovation.

That means open source adopters often move away from it, knowingly going down this route of bait and switch. Effectively, they have exploited the benefits of open source to create adoption then switched away to make more money. Unfortunately, their actions have normalised this with venture capital, etc.

Forking is the ultimate safeguard of open source; those who have shifted away from open source are now being thwarted by the ability of users, as well as the open source community, to fork code. That's all that the creation of the Valkey fork of Redis is.

Forking may be the nuclear option, but it is how open source keep its leadership in check. Of course the Redis leadership are not happy, but they are the ones in the wrong here: they chose to open source and then broke their unwritten contract and commitment to open source.

Nobody made Redis or any other company open source their code. That was their choice. If they had not worked out how to monetise it, then they ought not to have done so. The cloud companies have been using open source since 2012; it's nothing new, and any business that has open sourced its code since then should have factored that into its business model.

It is more than an argument that open source means that anyone can use the code for any purpose. That is the very heart of open source and the lifeblood that has led to its success and adoption at scale. The friction caused by any conditions being added to that destroys this, and would effectively be the blockage that destroys open source if that were to be introduced.

What is needed today is not a change to open source, but for business people not to open source if they don't want to stay the course. Take the time to understand what you are getting into before you commit.

That's not about the need to change open source, it's about being better business people. If they want to create public or distributed source - i.e to share their code with a non-open source licence that has restrictions whilst making their code public, that's cool. Just please stop calling it open source when it is not.

In terms of open source's future... The open source community could never have envisioned the scale of success of the last 10 years. That success means that today it forms the basis of our digital infrastructure.

For open source to be sustained we need our maintainers supported, and both skills developed and funding. The success will not be sustainable if open source's fundamental premise is changed.

We need both enterprise and the public sector to give back, and we need to create the means for that money to be properly funnelled to the right people.

Personally, I want to see open source recognised by governments as a digital public good, and funding at a scale beyond that which we are currently considering.

Amanda Brock is CEO of OpenUK

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