

Chapter 4

Open Source and Open Access: How Do You Compete with Free?

ABSTRACT

The open source and open access movements, both philosophical concepts as well as models of information flow, have been instrumental in the development of the business of free. This chapter defines both models and traces their history. Open source shaped the growth of the Web and changed consumer expectations, and as a result, companies have developed various ways to generate revenue even while giving their products away. The open access movement grew in tandem with electronic publishing and has led to both the user expectation of free content and a question of how publications can survive that expectation. Open source and open access will continue to influence the software industry, which is developing a “freemium” model for generating revenue from free products. The publishing industry will need to evolve radically, and open source and open access may also drive the integration of “open government” principles into our political systems.

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the digital age, many of the oldest economic models are beginning to show their faults. Nowhere is this trend more abundantly clear than in the fast-paced, ever-changing information industry. As the fastest-growing industry in the world, it has been largely responsible for ushering in the digital age, and this paradigm shift now affects the way we as a society do business, communicate with

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one another, gain access to media and information, and even the way we vote. In a world where most products and services have some free alternative accessible through the Internet, the business of free information is more appealing than ever. Consumers' first instincts are to expect the information they need to be available and free through Web searches, social networks, and commercial Websites.

At the forefront of the movement towards free information are the concepts of *open source* and *open access*. These “open” concepts have been instrumental in shaping the current information industry and the digital age as we move into the future.

WHAT ARE OPEN SOURCE AND OPEN ACCESS?

Open Source

Open source as a philosophical concept has been around for a while, particularly in the area of software development. The open source philosophy rejects the “trade secret” model of development and replaces it with a wide-open model wherein anyone can review the development of a product or service and, in many situations, contribute to the effort. In the information industry, this often means that users can alter a software program at its source to meet their own needs and then release their work under free license so it can be used and altered by other users. In this way, new features can be added into the core build more rapidly than under a traditional software development framework.

A good example is the Android operating system for mobile devices. Its open source designation means that anyone who wants to develop applications for it may do so. Developers are encouraged to share their new applications with others using the Android Market. This is in contrast with older cell phones, which use closed-source operating platforms. Those phones came with a fixed number of features that the user could not expand or alter.

At its core, the open source philosophy asserts that professionals working in a given industry tend to share common ambitions even if their specific goals differ. As a result, it is often mutually beneficial for a person to make work publicly available for review and expansion by peers. The idea is that this “peer production” leads to a more successful end product thanks to public review and the resulting contributions from professional community members. Those contributions would not have been possible if the product's plans had not been open source. However, open source development is controversial because it undermines longstanding tenets of business such as traditional standards of copyright, intellectual property dominion, and consumer-corporate relations.

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