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License Discussion

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Many software companies will not use GPL code in their own software, even those that are highly committed to open source development. This stems from the legitimate concern that use of the GPL will "infect" their code base by its viral nature. In effect, they want to retain the right to release some proprietary code. Companies make for some of the best developers, because they have the resources to get a job done, even a boring one, if they need it in their code. The benefits of collaborating with the private sector are real, whereas the fear that some private company will "steal" your product and sell it in a proprietary application leaving you with nothing is not (real).

The point of this discussion is to convince people who have released code under the GPL to re-release it under an MIT compatible license. Package authors retain the copyright to their software and have discretion to re-release it under a license of their choosing. Many people choose the GPL when releasing a package because it is the most famous open source license, and did not consider issues such as those raised here when choosing a license. When asked, these developers will often be amenable to re-releasing their code under a more permissive license. Fernando Perez did this with ipython, which was released under the LGPL and then re-released under a BSD license to ease integration with matplotlib, scipy and other code. The LGPL is more permissive than the GPL, allowing you to link with it non-virally, but many companies are still loath to use it out of legal concerns, and you cannot reuse LGPL code in a proprietary product.

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