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Chrome a bit less secret PDF reader goes open-s

The software Google's browser uses to show PDFs has been proprietary for years, but now it's an open-source project called PDFium that others can scrutinize or use themselves.



Stephen Shankland  June 11, 2014 3:18 p.m. PT

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Stephen Shankland/CNET

Chrome, Google's mostly open-source Web browser, just proprietary.

Foxit's software for reading PDF (Portable Document Forr years a proprietary part of Chrome, now is an open-sourc called [PDFium](#), [Foxit announced on its blog](#). Google's [Fra](#) [pointed out the change](#) on Google+ Wednesday. The cha there's one more useful tool that programmers can draw less piece of potentially suspicious software that Google

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urking in Google's browser.

With open-source software, anyone may scrutinize and modify the underlying source code then distribute the finished software built from that source code. The approach shuts off the opportunity making opportunities of proprietary software such as Microsoft Adobe Photoshop, but it can be good for security since you can track down bugs and vulnerabilities. It also helps build a community of interested people and organizations that collectively develop software and can rapidly encourage the spread of the code software since it's available at no cost.

Security is a particularly important consideration in the case of PDF software has been a high-profile way for people to leverage on Web browsers. By making PDFs easier for programmers to use, the PDFium move also could help the prospects of PDF, a standard originally created by Adobe Systems that's widely used for archival data like bank statements and carefully formatted documents like online brochures.

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It's common to see open-source software sponsored by a company that uses it to serve a different end than direct sales. In Google's case, its ends are online services such as search, Gmail, YouTube, and Android Apps. Google doesn't sell Chrome, but Chrome furthers Google's money-making services.

One company's open-source project can also undermine the prospects of another company's proprietary rival -- Google's open-source Android mobile operating system taking on Apple's iOS, for example. In the case of the open-source PDFium, Google Systems for years has given away its Adobe Reader software to read PDF files at no charge to users, but its higher-end Adobe Acrobat which can create and edit PDF files -- costs money.

Google runs another open-source project called Chromium, which combined with some proprietary elements, becomes Chrome. Chrome has grown over the last year to become the second most popular Web browser behind Microsoft's Internet Explorer. Among its proprietary parts are software for decoding video compressed with patent-encumbered H.264 technology, a version of Adobe's Flash Player, and Google's own Widevine digital rights management (DRM) software for video copy protection. Now, the PDF reader is no longer on that proprietary list.

That's good news for Google and others, too, according to a founding member of the Chrome team.

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reduces the number of closed pieces of Chrome, and that's a good thing for which people can be suspicious that we're doing

shady. It makes a high-quality PDF plugin available to use want an open-source product and were using Chromium Kasting said. "It is almost certainly the highest-quality PDF available in the open-source world, and can now serve as for other projects, or be included in other browsers based or other open-source projects entirely."

Google has enough power, exerted through search, Android and other avenues, that it attracts many critics. The transparency of open-source software makes it harder to hide something within a program, such as a service that secretly shares data with a government surveillance operation.

One of the beneficiaries of the PDFium move is Opera Software, which scrapped its own browser engine last year and incorporated Chromium instead. Now it'll get a PDF reader of its own for

Mozilla has taken a different approach with its Firefox browser, using its own PDF reader called PDF.js that runs atop the browser using the JavaScript language. It's already open-source software, just about everything Mozilla does.

Foxit, too, is of course affected by the open-source move

"Our high-performance, highly accurate, and platform-independent software technology will help developers everywhere to improve their powerful PDF technology when creating innovative applications," said company Founder and Chairman Eugene Xiong in the company's statement. But it's not stopping sales of its product: the compar

for use of its Foxit PDF SDK (Software Development Kit), v
embedded in other software and which offers more featu
open-source PDFium.



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