

Corporate-Friendly Open Source Licenses [closed]

Asked 16 years, 3 months ago Modified 12 years, 3 months ago

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37



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What open source licenses are more corporate-friendly, i.e., they can be used in commercial products without the need to open source the commercial product?

open-source

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edited Aug 29, 2012 at 12:07



casperOne

74.5k ● 19 ● 188 ● 259

asked Aug 26, 2008 at 16:26



Krishna Kumar

4,864 ● 13 ● 47 ● 46

- 1 It would be helpful to know which StackExchange would be more appropriate for questions about licensing. software-engineering? – [ILikeFood](#) May 24, 2019 at 15:56

All though I personally disagree with this question being off-topic there is a Law stack exchange these days that would probably be more receptive to such a question – [norlesh](#) Mar 19, 2020 at 1:32 ✎

10 Answers

Sorted by:

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31



I recommend the Apache License (specifically, version 2). It is not a “copy left” license and it addresses several matters that are important to established companies and their lawyers.

“Copy left” is the philosophy of the free software foundation requiring anything incorporating the licensed opens source code to also be licensed as open source. That philosophy is regarded as poison by established companies that want to keep their products proprietary.

Aside from not having “copy left” provisions, the Apache license specifically addresses the grant of rights from project contributors and it expressly addresses the fact that modern companies are typically made up for more than one legal entity (for example, a parent company and its subsidiaries). Most open source licenses don’t address these points.

Whatever license you choose, if you want your code to be “corporate friendly,” in the sense that you want it to be incorporated into commercial, non-open source products, it is essential that you avoid GPL and other “copy left” type licenses. While it would be best to consult with your own lawyer before investing time or money in a project for which this is an important factor, a quick shorthand for licenses that are and are not “copy left” can be found on the Free Software Foundation’s website. They identify which licenses they don’t find meet their standards as “copy left.” The ones FSF rejects are most likely the ones that will be corporate friendly in this sense.

(Although the question didn’t ask this, it is worth mentioning that, with very few exceptions, even GPL and other “copy left” type licenses are perfectly corporate friendly if they are only used internally by the commercial entities and not incorporated into their products.)

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answered Sep 2, 2008 at 5:45

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[Will M](#)

2,491 ● 2 ● 18 ● 19

-
- 2 So if OS license has no copy left, can someone grab all the work, add one line, and sell it as a new product granted they give the credit?. I'm speaking roughly here, but that's what I understand. Obviously none will buy an Apache server when Apache web server is free. – [OscarRyz](#) Oct 2, 2008 at 23:23

From what I understand, yes a company could do this. Companies sell Linux for instance. – [Lance Fisher](#) Dec 7, 2008 at 1:26

Yes; MS Windows in fact contains code from BSD under a similar license. Basically it says "do what you want with this code; sell it, modify it, whatever, just make sure you include this license with the parts you copied and give us credit".

– [Adam Jaskiewicz](#) Apr 6, 2009 at 17:20

Yeah, you can sell things released under Apache License. Something like this happened to Castle Active Record IIRC.

– [Krzysztof Kozmic](#) May 4, 2009 at 10:35



12



Basically, only the GPL requires that the whole product is GPL, and LGPL implies that the parts specific to that library be open sourced. But, for both, the problem arises only when you distribute the application.

For all the other open source licenses, the only common requirement is the publicity (ie. show at some point to the user what open source component / library is used).

After that you have the "no competing commercial product" licenses...

All in all, the most acknowledged business friendly license are IMHO the [Apache License](#), the [Artistic License](#) and the [Mozilla Public license](#).

Furthermore, even if [Creative Commons](#) is not widely used for software development, some options are business friendly.

Edit: forgot [BSD](#) (which is more a license-template than a license) and [MIT](#) mentioned by Daniel. It seems to me

that their usages are fading away, but there is some license tropism to take in account according to the development language / open source sub-community.

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edited Jan 8, 2010 at 14:23

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answered Aug 26, 2008 at 16:42



Damien B

2,003 ● 15 ● 19



5



The two most commonly used licenses that allow what you want are the [BSD License](#) and [MIT License](#). (see also the full [list of licenses](#) considered Open Source by the OSI).

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answered Aug 26, 2008 at 16:33



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dF.

75.7k ● 31 ● 135 ● 137



3



As a possible alternative to the BSD license you can also use the [Ms-PL](#) license (Microsoft public license). Pretty much the same but (arguably) better worded. Additionally, It's got "Microsoft" in its name, which screams "corporate-friendly" like nothing else does. ;-)



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answered Aug 26, 2008 at 16:36



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[Konrad Rudolph](#)

545k ● 139 ● 956 ● 1.2k



2



I believe that 6 of the 9 licenses on the OSI's list of "Licenses that are popular and widely used or with strong communities" meet your criterion: Apache, BSD, MIT, Mozilla, CPL, and Eclipse. The Mozilla license and CPL (the Common Public License) have language concerning patents that might make them more attractive to corporations.



[See here](#) for more information.

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edited Sep 2, 2008 at 6:44

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answered Sep 2, 2008 at 6:31



[Chris Conway](#)

56k ● 43 ● 131 ● 155



The [GNU Lesser General Public Licence](#) is also corporate-friendly and quite often used in libraries. It

1

allows for *usage* of a certain library but modifications to it should be made public.



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edited Jun 20, 2020 at 9:12



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1 • 1



answered Aug 26, 2008 at 16:35



Huppie

11.4k • 4 • 33 • 34

Modification to the library you mean, or the "program" I create and that uses the library? – [OscarRyz](#) Oct 2, 2008 at 23:12

Modifications to the library indeed. The program itself can still have a custom license and can be modified whenever you like. – [Huppie](#) Oct 3, 2008 at 15:58

-
- 1 An example of a library with LGPL license, is NHiebrante. If you modify it, you are obligated to publish your changes, but if you only use binary version, you are free to build proprietary software on top of that. – [Krzysztof Kozmic](#) May 4, 2009 at 10:38

@KrzysztofKozmic If you use an LGPL library in a proprietary product, you do have to ensure that end users are allowed to modify the LGPL portions. In practice, this usually means you have to dynamically-link the library. – [C. K. Young](#) Sep 25, 2013 at 3:05 ✎



1

By "corporate" I tend to think of internal development, programs distributed only to people that are employed by the same company. In that sense, pretty much all free software licences are "corporate-friendly."



However, in terms of distributing closed-source software that contains free software the only big one (off the top of my head) that is excluded is the GPL. You could embed LGPL, BSD, MIT, Artistic licenced code. The "price" might be having to give credit, but that would be way cheaper than actually writing and debugging the software.

Things can get hazy when you consider licences that try to protect trademarks (Mozilla) or the compatibility of a broader range of software (Sun). Your constraints are not always only related to the distribution of the code.

In summary, if you're unsure you should consult a lawyer.

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answered Aug 26, 2008 at 16:41

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[Stephen Darlington](#)

52.5k ● 12 ● 108 ● 153



1

Ideally I looked for components licensed under the [Apache Software License](#). After that LGPL, BSD and Artistic License are my next preferences.



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answered Aug 26, 2008 at 16:47

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[Brian Matthews](#)

8,596 ● 7 ● 47 ● 68



MIT, Apache and BSD tend to be the most corporate friendly. The least corporate friendly that I have ran across are usually Q Public, GPL and Mozilla...

1

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answered May 4, 2009 at 10:30

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McGovernTheory

6,654 ● 5 ● 42 ● 75



1

Wikipedia also has a very useful [list that compares all the free software licenses](#). If you have a green box on the right ("Release changes under a different license"), I think that's all you need.



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answered Aug 15, 2011 at 9:20

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Alex Florescu

5,141 ● 1 ● 29 ● 49

