**The Story of Firefox OS**

*By Richa Kulkarni, BE 2/4 CSE-3*

Not many are familiar with Mozilla’s own operating system, Firefox OS. The one-of-a-kind, entirely open-source operating system made the news one last time recently when Mozilla announced its discontinuation. Mozilla, one of the world’s largest free software communities, has decided to redirect all it energies towards their Firefox web browser. The story of the Firefox OS, however, is one worth telling.

In July 2011, Mozilla announced its “Boot to Gecko” project (B2G), with the aim of creating a “a complete, stand-alone operating system for the open web.” This, in 2013, was renamed the Firefox OS, after their popular browser. The most striking feature of this project was that it sought to create a full-fledged operating system using only web technologies. Indeed, in its final form, the Firefox OS used only HTML5, CSS, JavaScript, and C++. The four co-founders of the project were Andreas Gal, Chris Jones, Brendan Eich (also the creator of Javascript) and Mike Shaver.

They built an empty GitHub repository and put together a small team to work with the Linux kernel and the existing Android Hardware Abstraction layer. The uniqueness of this project lies in the fact that it eliminated the entire layer of Java code that the Android OS could not function without. In February 2012, the team presented a prototype at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona. Here, it gained new partners, and promised to have commercial devices ready to ship the following year. It accomplished this, becoming arguably the only OS to be visualized and marketed in only two years.

While the developers kept the user interface as simple and as close to Android as possible, they were anxious not to be seen as a third alternative mobile app platform to Google and Apple, but as a new idea that could harness the endless capacity of the open web. After a response to the first version that exceeded expectations greatly, Mozilla began work on the $25 smartphone for people in developing countries. After this product failed to take off, the B2G project took a downward turn and began to fizzle out. Many attributed this not to their inability to catch up with Android, but to the lack of effective product leadership inside the company.

The downward spiral continued until Mozilla finally pulled the plug and discontinued its mobile OS, branching into tablets and smart TVs. However, Firefox OS was, and will always be, a fine example of the power of open-source technologies, and as a strong competitor to the two titans: Google and Apple. It was a commendable attempt in the history of app and web development.