

OpenSource

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BUSINESS

Database maker Redis makes its module code proprietary

A timely reminder that open source is not for life...

Redis Labs has announced that its range of Redis Modules are no longer open source.

By abandoning the AGPL licence, in favour of combining Apache v2.0 with Commons Clause, in-house modules extending the functionality of the Redis database software are now off-limits to third-party cloud service providers.

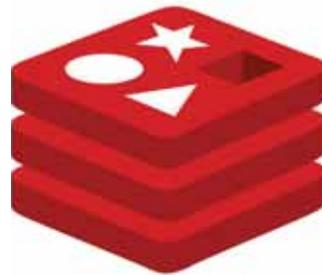
Modules affected by this change include RediSearch, Redis Graph and ReJSON. Redis Labs cofounder and CTO Yiftach Shoolman justified the development in a blog post, complaining that “Cloud providers have been taking advantage of the open source community for years [...]. This discourages the community from investing in developing open source code, because any potential benefit goes to cloud providers rather than the code developer.”

To understand the implications of this, we spoke to Shashank Sharma (www.menschlaw.in), a trial lawyer and software licensing expert who has been writing about open source software for more than 14 years.

He told us that while the Redis project remains BSD-licensed, only RedisLabs’ Redis Modules have been switched to the “so-called Apache+Commons Clause license. [However,] the Redis community can still contribute modules to the project, under their own chosen licences, such as AGPL. In fact, the lead developer in a blog post confirmed that his current Redis module, Disque, will be released under AGPL.”

The important distinction, notes Sharma, is that “just because the source is available doesn’t make software open source or free. There are essential freedoms (as the FSF calls them) which makes software Free.”

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redis

Similarly, the Open Source Definition has a set of conditions defining open source software. By adopting the Commons Clause, Redis is eroding, or fundamentally altering, these freedoms. “Redis call the new licence for Redis Modules Apache + Commons Clause, which may lead to people mistakenly concluding that Redis Modules are still open source. Any alteration of the licence terms to limit the freedoms/permissions that it allows changes the licence from open source to proprietary.”

Redis claims it wants to limit how cloud providers can profit from Redis deployments and support services, ensuring any money made with its software isn’t by third parties. But Sharma told **Linux User & Developer** that the adoption of the Commons Clause has “broader implications,” referring specifically to this line of the clause:

“Sell” means practising any or all of the rights granted to you under the Licence to provide to third parties, for a fee or other consideration (including without limitation

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Above Redis says it doesn’t want third-party cloud providers profiting from its software

fees for hosting or consulting/support services related to the Software), a product or service whose value derives, entirely or substantially, from the functionality of the Software.”

Not only will this impact cloud providers, but also Linux support companies and individual consultants. Sharma concludes: “The real issue for anyone using Redis is how much of the reliance is on Redis Core, and whether anyone can use Redis without relying on Redis Modules.”