

Scientific progress is a primary human need



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Abstract

Deepak asked me to comment on his blog post [Is your web service open source?](#). With a slight delay, I did on FriendFeed. I'll copy it here.

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The question is about getting return-on-investment: if I developed a new algorithm (or new efficient implementation), how can I make some money with that, to feed me, continue development, maybe just maintenance. And, how does that work for scientific software, which can best be opensource? So I replied:

Deepak, did not have time to read it earlier. I have not worked out monetizing open source chemoinformatics. As a scientist, I take the position that any implementation must be open source; that's mere consequence of the scientific requirements for peer review and reproducibility. I do understand that further research has to be funded; by making code proprietary, the guy doing the further research is the original author. That's not necessarily the right thing for scientific progress.

As a human being, I need feeding. So, I certainly understand making code proprietary, as I have not seen much success in funding ROI via support, though I do think this is the way to go, for scientific software that is. Web services are clear services, sort of consultancy with human involvement. And consultancy is proven technology. Sell access to your service. Anyone can theoretically set it up, but practically... so you basically sell your IT expertise.

A third aspect is user friendly GUIs. Say, ChemOffice, say Bioclipse. These are also scientifically not interesting to develop. Bioclipse, being open source, is an interesting example. The core is open, free, any one can contribute, and embed that cool new algorithm easily. This 'plugin' can be proprietary and sold commercially. No scientific shame, but with a chance for getting some ROI.

Science should be open, and never be a source of capitalism. I am not against capitalism, but I find it rather unethical to say, sure, your starving (dying from AIDS, whatever) guy, surely I can help; it will just cost ya. Making money because people like buying big cars, Pokemon cards, want their DNA sequenced, sure, no problem. But don't start making money from primary needs. Scientific progress is a primary need.

Some more details on my background on these issues can be found in [I don't blame Individuals in Commercial Chemoinformatics](#) and [Why ODOSOS is important](#).