

Corporate Mozilla gets thumbs-up from industry

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The foundation announced on Wednesday morning that it is creating a wholly owned subsidiary, the Mozilla Corporation, which will give it more freedom to generate revenues through commercial activities.

James Governor, an analyst at RedMonk, praised this move and said it is likely to increase the use of Mozilla's open-source products, such as the Firefox browser, by businesses.

"I think it's a reasonably significant step. If Mozilla wants to do business with corporate entities, it needs to be a corporate entity--corporations want to do business with corporations," said Governor. "Almost all open-source organizations that are successful have some commercial organization around them."

Michael Goulde, an analyst at Forrester Research, said having a commercial organization around open-source software tends to give businesses the confidence to migrate from proprietary software.

"We're seeing an evolution of open-source projects from pure voluntary efforts with uncertain long-term viability to models that make it easier for customers to place strategic bets on open-source software," said Goulde. "Mozilla Foundation's move is very much in tune with this direction, using the commercial organization to develop a revenue stream that can support a professional staff that can manage and drive the project into the future."

The response of the Mozilla community so far has generally also been positive, with a number of postings on Mozilla employees' blogs praising the move. Mozilla contributor David Hallowell said it seems to be a good move, adding that any concerns that the organization may change the software's license conditions are unfounded.

"I'm sure some people will be worried for the future of the Mozilla source code, but there is nothing to worry about in this case. The code is published under an open license with a huge number of contributors who would all have to give consent for the license to be changed," Hallowell said.

Though some in the open-source community may have ideological issues with Mozilla's commercial move, RedMonk's Governor expects few will be critical.

"I don't think many open-source geeks will hold up their hands in horror that Mozilla is going commercial," he said.

By Ingrid Marson

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