

The falsehoods of anti-AGPL propaganda

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Google is well-known for forbidding the use of software using the GNU Affero General Public License, commonly known as "AGPL". Google is also well-known for being the subject of cargo-culting by fad startups. Unfortunately, this means that they are susceptible to what is ultimately anti-AGPL propaganda from Google, with little to no basis in fact.

[...]

The Google page about the AGPL details inaccurate (but common) misconceptions about the obligations of the AGPL that don't follow from the text. Google states that if, for example, Google Maps used PostGIS as its data store, and PostGIS used the AGPL, Google would be required to release the Google Maps code. This is not true. They would be required to release their PostGIS patches in this situation. AGPL does not extend the GPL in that it makes the Internet count as a form of linking which creates a derivative work, as Google implies, but rather that it makes anyone who uses the software via the Internet entitled to its source code. It does not update the "what counts as a derivative work?" algorithm, so to speak ? it updates the "what counts as distributing?" the software? algorithm.

The reason they spread these misconceptions is straightforward: they want to discourage people from using the AGPL, because they cannot productize such software effectively. Google wants to be able to incorporate FOSS software into their products and sell it to users without the obligation to release their derivative works. Google is an Internet company, and they offer Internet services. The original GPL doesn't threaten their scheme because their software is accessed over the Internet, not distributed to end-users directly.

[3]

Source URL: <http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/140372>

Links:

[1] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/taxonomy/term/144>

[2] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/taxonomy/term/106>

[3] <https://drewdevault.com/2020/07/27/Anti-AGPL-propaganda.html>