Open Pocketbooks

Serendipitous Flattr-y *By Rikki Kite*

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Recently, I had a Facebook debate with some of my friends about Microsoft ads that appear in Linux publications or on Linux-focused websites. One friend thought that Microsoft ads "pollute" Linux sites. Another friend said, "Oh, the irony! Microsoft's ad dollars support a Linux website." I lean toward the "A girl's gotta eat" philosophy and think that if any ad is a decent fit for the audience, more power to it. The ad in question is for a Windows server, and I know from experience that plenty of Linux enthusiasts work with Windows, too, which makes that ad a good fit in my book.

Tech journalist Joe "Zonker" Brockmeier joined the debate, saying, "I think Linux pubs should have a kickstarter-type option, where they require readers to subscribe or chip in for content until they reach $X dollars – otherwise, the pub takes Microsoft money. I say that because a lot of Linux folks will bitch to the high heavens about a pub taking Microsoft money to pay for content, but if asked to part with their own money … well, at least Microsoft ponies up." Zonker admits that other people in the open source community both are in the position to contribute financially and do so. "Many people in the Linux community will pay, of course, but often I find a correlation between the users who complain about ads (Microsoft and others) and those who want everything for free. You can't have it both ways."

I found it serendipitous that I'd learn about Flattr [1] soon after that Facebook discussion. Released in 2010, Flattr is "the worlds first social micro-payment system." Think of it this way: If the *Like* button and PayPal married, they'd have a Flattr baby. Here's how it works: You set up a Flattr account at Flattr.com, add money to it monthly, and then you can click the Flattr button on pages or websites. At the end of each month, the money you put into your account is divided equally among the websites,

projects, or companies you flattr'd. Flattr gets its cut for providing this cool service by keeping 10 percent of revenues received; however, that fee is waived for "charity" accounts [2].

In July 2010, Debian developer Raphaël Hertzog posted an article [3] that explained how Flattr could help open source projects. He also announced a new project, Flattr Free and Open Source Software [4], which is a monthly opt-in email [5] that features some free software projects you can flattr. Currently only about 120 people subscribe to the list, but Hertzog says that the number is growing steadily.

Hertzog also says some open source projects are already bringing in revenue with Flattr, but other projects have challenges. "Some people find it difficult to set up Flattr for a community project where you have multiple persons involved, and it's true that if you don't have existing rules to deal with donations, the usage of Flattr forces you to solve this problem first," Hertzog says. "And it's not always easy because the contributors do not necessarily have the same ideas of what should be done with the money." If you'd like to give an open source project some Flattr love, sign up for Hertzog's monthly email, or support his Debian work with your first friendly Flattr [6]. ■■■

LIKEABLE LINKS

[1] Flattr: *http://www.flattr.com*

[2] Flattr charity and nonprofit accounts: *https://flattr.com/support/charityaccount*

[3] Social Micropayment Can Foster Free Software, Discover Flattr: *http://raphaelhertzog.com/2010/07/15/social-micropayment-can-foster-free-software-discover-flattr/*

[4] Flattr Free and Open Source Software: *http://raphaelhertzog.com/flattr-foss/*

[5] Flattr FLOSS article archive: *http://raphaelhertzog.com/category/flattr/*

[6] Flattr Hertzog's Debian book: *http://raphaelhertzog.com/2010/07/28/do-you-want-a-free-debian-book/*