

Cutting off your nose to spite your face

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Everyone is in business to make money. Take your typical company. They invent a product of some sort, they produce it, and then they attempt to sell it. But what happens when they want more money for the product than anyone is willing to pay?

When I was much younger, and before the hey-day of the Internet, I was a frequent visitor to what were called BBSes. These were machines that you would dial into with your computer, and could chat with other users, read/write messages, and so on. A lot of these BBSes were places to meet and communicate with other users, while some of them were actually games to play.

One of my favorite game BBSes, was one called Pyroto Mountain. I would dial in, once a day, to play this game, against other players, to try and be the first person to reach the top of Pyroto mountain. The game was set in a realm of magic, and you used magic spells to accomplish all things in the game. At its roots, the game was one of trivia, because you were required to answer a trivia question to move up a level on the mountain. In any case, this game was very fun.

Back in the early to mid nineties, when the Internet was hitting its boon, I contacted the author of Pyroto mountain, and expressed interest in creating an internet version of this BBS favorite. He told me that a friend of his had been wanting to do the same, and he was going to give his friend the option.

Fast forward 10 years. In a moment of nostalgia, I remember my days of Pyroto Mountain, and call upon the gods of Google to find me information on this game. To my surprise, I indeed find a company marketing the Pyroto Mountain software, but not a SINGLE running installation. Even the DEMO site the company ran is down. I find some links on people blogs, who said they played the game and now miss it. Excellent, I thought, there is still a place for Pyroto.

So I contact the people at Pyroto, and tell them I'm interested in getting a license, but I also would like to be able to convert the code from ASP/SQL SERVER into PHP/MySQL. The response I got from the company is that everyone wants Pyroto, but no one wants to pay for it. Now, I'm not a millionaire, but I'm not exactly cheap either. I believe in a fair price for most things.

So I email back assuring them that I'm not looking for a freebie, but I'd like to convert to PHP/MySQL so I could run on a platform that I am familiar with, and have available. They finally get back to me, and among other things, here are the restrictions they wanted to impose:

- * If I licensed the software to run my own site, I couldn't call it Pyroto Mountain.
- * I would receive source code, and would be responsible for it. Not allowed to distribute, etc.
- * I'm not allowed to create derivatives, or earn a profit from the software. And if I do make bug fixes or improvements, I have to pass back all code fixed to them.
- * In addition to the licensing fee, I would be responsible for the costs of drawing up these legal contracts.

Drawing up these legal contracts? Aren't these people ALREADY in the business of selling licenses for their software?? I mean, don't they have contracts already?

In any case, nothing was mentioned about me porting to php, nor about price. So I shoot off another email, asking about these two things. After thinking about it for 2 days, I finally get a response. In addition to the previous restrictions, these new points were made:

- * When converting to php/mysql, I would need to send constant updates back to Pyroto, so in the end they would have, themselves, a fully functional PHP version.
- * Since they would have a php version to sell, they would give me a license at a discounted price of \$4,500.

Once you are done choking, let me assure you, they said four thousand, five hundred dollars. When I wrote them back and expressed my concern about the extravagant price for a web-based game, the owner simply stated that he knew we would end up here, where no one wanted to pay for software they obviously wanted.

Hello?! McFly?!? I, for the record, believe Microsoft is out of thier freakin minds selling thier OS for \$200+ a copy. But someone who has a web-based game wants \$5k a license (He only told me \$4500 because he would be getting a free PHP port out of it)? No wonder he has no installs! When I politely questioned him further, and even pointed out professional software (like vBulletin, for example) that only costs \$160, he responded that his company licenses a CRM system for \$125 a month. And at 3 years, that could break even. So, if you were able to get \$125 a month in donations for three years, the system would pay for itself. And since he spent all of his time WRITING this software, he wont sell it for any cheaper.

So, talk about cutting off your nose to spite your face. Refusing to charge any less for a product because you wrote it, but at the same time, guaranteeing you wont sell a single license because of how much you want per license. There is a lesson to be learned here, that no matter how good your product is, you need to know your target audience. Otherwise, you are doomed to take your awesome product down the path of obscurity, whether it deserves it or not.

If I were to put up a Pyroto site, it would be for the fun and enjoyment of myself and my users, not some odd donation or profit scheme. That being said, I'll probably go download an open source game and mold into something my users would like. No it wont be Pyroto, but it would be much more reasonable.