

# Microsoft and the Opening of its Source Code: True Interoperability on the Horizon?

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The announcement to open part of its code comes at a crucial time in terms of Microsoft's future. It comes just a few days prior to the publication of an EU record fine for a single company, amounting to 899 million euros, precisely for charging inflated royalty prices for the code information it provides to developers so that they can make products that are compatible with its Windows operating system. This ruling puts Microsoft's total fine at over 1.7 billion euros. Obviously, the European Commission has given little credibility to this announcement, waiting instead for the real facts to emerge, since this is the fifth time the multinational from Redmond has made such an offering.

There have been many voices discrediting the words of Steve Ballmer, who has called these moves "an important step and significant change in how we share information about our products and technologies," citing opportunism both in terms of the EU decision and the push to get ISO approval for the standardization of Office Open XML (OOXML). This was initially rejected last September, but the final decision will have to be made in the coming weeks. It will be a decision that affects the status of a good many lucrative government contracts.

Nonetheless, there are signs that not all is about opportunism. Perhaps this time it truly entails the start of a bigger change in Redmond, driven by Ray Ozzie, the company's chief software architect, who has long since advocated broader recognition among his very ranks that the world is shifting ever more towards increased sharing of information. For this reason, the announcement could be more than anything an internal warning, to break down and overcome the resistance to a new model.

Given that companies' IT architectures are often highly diverse, having interoperability between applications is becoming more and more of an essential requirement. According to Ozzie, "by increasing the openness of our products, we will provide developers additional opportunity to innovate and deliver value for consumers." Thus, given that over the past few years Microsoft had not managed to gain enough

acceptance for its integrated platform with proprietary solutions, it now looks to join forces with the same parties it once tried to oust from the market. Still, though, charging royalties on reasonable and nondiscriminatory terms, as long as the developers using part of the Microsoft code do so for commercial purposes. In other words, the code is being opened, as is a new and potentially juicy source of revenue. At the end of the day, it's business as usual. And that is something that with the giant of Redmond everyone understands.