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[Microsoft Continues Its Love/Hate Ballet with Open Source](#)

With Brad Smith leading

Microsoft, the traditional anti-open source poster child, now embarked on a journey of interoperability, is stuck in a love/hate ballet with its direct OSS competitors. Long time situated at the opposite poles of the technology spectrum, in terms of the contrast between open source and proprietary software, the OSS community and the Redmond giant are extending bridges between their respective solutions. In the middle, the main beneficiaries are also the customers that have triggered the interoperability rush, because of the increasing need to run heterogeneous environments. Microsoft is indeed pouring a consistent amount of efforts into tweaking its products to support interoperability and to play well in mixed source scenarios. A case in point is Brad Smith's presentation at the Open Source Business Conference in San Francisco. Smith is of course Microsoft's Senior Vice President, General Counsel, Corporate Secretary, Legal & Corporate Affairs. At the Open Source Business Conference he attempted to convince hard core open source developers that Microsoft today is an entirely new Microsoft. "We believe in the importance of building a bridge that makes it possible for different parts of the industry to work together. We believe in a bridge that is scalable, that is workable, that is affordable...that's a hard bridge to build. But I will say this--today more than ever that is a bridge we very much need to build," Smith said according to [Coop's Corner](#). Smith was the voice of the new Microsoft in an overhauled discourse with the open source community, one with a strong focus on a conciliatory tone. And on the Redmond company's behalf, Smith praised open source software for the increasingly important role it plays in the industry, acknowledging that Microsoft has failed to admit this in the past. On the other hand, Smith was also the voice of the old Microsoft when he accused the open source and free software community of infringing with its products on no less than 235 patents owned by the Redmond company. To this day Microsoft has failed to make public the list of patents. Smith indicated that Microsoft does share the list in private negotiations with companies looking for patent licensing deals, but that a public version is unlikely. "Will we publish, on the Web, a broader list? That is not something that any other company in our industry does today. And yet, we do find ourselves as a company repeatedly getting requests from other companies to license their patents, to pay them royalties. We believe that, especially as long as there are other companies in our industry that come to us, asking us to take a license and pay a royalty, that it is important for us to work on a reciprocal basis -- and that means providing information on our patents in a forum where they are providing information to us on their patents. We're not comfortable being the only company in our industry, certainly, to take a unilateral step, especially when that step could change the dynamic, subsequently, for discussions with other companies," Smith said to [SeattlePI](#).