UNDERSTANDING TRADEMARKS

in the context of open source

Open Source Leadership Summit, March 2019
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INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

• **Patents** - a government authority or license conferring a right or title for a set period, especially the sole right to exclude others from making, using, or selling an invention

• **Copyrights** - the exclusive legal right, given to an originator or an assignee to print, publish, perform, film, or record literary, artistic, or musical material, and to authorize others to do the same

• **Trademarks** - ???
UNDERSTANDING TRADEMARKS WILL . . .

• Help you to avoid legal issues with your project names!
• Set yourself apart!
• **Protect your users!**
WHAT IS A TRADEMARK?

A trademark is any symbol, word, phrase or design that identifies and distinguishes the source of the goods/services of one party from those of others.

Let’s Encrypt

name

logo
FOSS projects are generally about being open; we don’t want to place unnecessary restrictions on the uses that others make of our work.

Trademark rights may seem inconsistent with FOSS ethics/objectives.

Trademark rules are all about *user and consumer protection*!

Trademarks help consumers recognize your products, enabling the public to associate your brand with the quality work you produce.
• Pick a strong brand!
• Clear the brand for use!
• Register your brand!
• Put a policy in place for your users!
• Defend your brand!
  • *as needed
HOW TO SELECT A TRADEMARK?

-or-

What makes a strong brand?
STRONG BRANDS ARE DISTINCT
(when applied to the goods on which they’re used)

APPLE

Generic | Descriptive | Suggestive | Arbitrary

Bad Brands! | Good Brands!

Spectrum of Distinctiveness!
CLEARANCE

- Google it!
  - *sorry Google
- USPTO database search
- Full trademark clearance report
CLEARANCE: WHEN IS A BRAND TOO CLOSE?
TO REGISTER OR NOT TO REGISTER?

Spoiler alert: you want to register!
BENEFITS OF REGISTRATION IN US

• Deterrent to junior users.
• Statutory presumptions.
• Helps with intermediaries.
THE REGISTRATION PROCESS

• File your trademark application!
• USPTO review / examination phase!
• Third party review / opposition phase!
• Registration!
  • *as long as you're using the mark

• Use it or lose it!
PROTECTING YOUR TRADEMARK

without being a troll
THE “DUTY TO POLICE” YOUR MARK

• “[T]here are a number of trademarks around the Ubuntu name and logo which we are required to “enforce” or risk losing them altogether. … That means: … we actively monitor, mostly using standard services, use of the name and logo [and] we aim to ensure that every use of the name and logo is supported by a “license” or grant of permission.” - Mark Shuttleworth re: C&D to fixubuntu.com (2013)

LIKELIHOOD OF CONFUSION FACTORS

**AMF, Inc. v. Sleekcraft Boats, 599 F.2d 341 (9th Cir. 1979):**

1. Strength of the mark;
2. Proximity of the goods;
3. Similarity of the marks;
4. Evidence of actual confusion;
5. Marketing channels used;
6. Type of goods and the degree of care likely to be exercised by the purchaser;
7. Junior user’s intent in selecting the mark; and
8. Likelihood of expansion of the product lines.
PURSUING INFRINGEMENT

- Consider whether the use is a non-trademark use, or fair use.
- Consider public/community perception.
- If infringer has applied for a trademark, TTAB proceeding is an option.
- In case of infringing domain name, UDRP available.
- Lawsuit if necessary.
DEFENSE: TRADEMARK FAIR USE

- Also known as “classic” or descriptive fair use. Defined as use (1) other than as a mark; (2) in a descriptive sense; (3) in good faith.

- HYGRADE FOOD PRODUCTS could not prevent a grocery store from using the phrase High Grade Food Stores to describe their stores.

- SWEET TARTS candy could not prevent Ocean Spray from referring to its cranberry juice as “sweet-tart” in taste.

- Abercrombie and Fitch could not prevent others from using its SAFARI mark to describe clothing intended for use in a safari.
DEFENSE: NOMINATIVE FAIR USE

• Use of a trademark to describe the trademark owner’s own goods or services, for purposes of comparison, criticism, point of reference, or similar purpose.

• Different standards in different jurisdictions.

• Ninth Circuit asks: (1) was the product readily identifiable without use of the mark? (2) Was more of the mark used than was necessary (e.g., logos)? (3) Was there a false suggestion of sponsorship/endorsement?

Int’l Information Systems Security Certification Consortium v. Security University (823 F.3d 153 (2d Cir. 2016))
TRADEMARKS AND THE COMMUNITY

- When others modify/distribute your software, to what extent are they allowed – or should they be allowed – to use your brand?
- How should your community interact with your brands?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Traditional” TM Owner</th>
<th>Open Source Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusive</td>
<td>Inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumptive</td>
<td>Generative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propertize</td>
<td>Share</td>
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</tbody>
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DO ALL USES NEED TO BE LICENSED?

- Potentially-infringing trademark uses that are not nominative/fair uses should be licensed.
- Linux Foundation’s approach:
  - If the answer to all three of the following questions is “yes,” then you need to apply for a sublicense. If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” then you do not need to apply for a sublicense.
    1. Is my mark a trademark (see how we define “trademark,” below)?
    2. Does my mark contain the following string of adjacent letters, in this order: “Linux”? These letters may or may not be capitalized, and in the case of foreign characters, phonetic translations also apply.
    3. Do I use my mark to identify software-related goods or services (see how that phrase is defined, below)?
QUALITY CONTROL

• No “naked licensing” permitted. If you grant permission for use of a mark, you must exercise quality control. Failure to do so can waive all TM rights.

• Freecycle Network: promotes giving unwanted items to strangers instead of discarding. Allows like-minded people to create groups, spread the good news.

• Freecycle Network didn’t retain express contractual control; didn’t have actual control over Freecycle Sunyvale’s use; unreasonably relied on FS’s quality control measures. TM abandoned. Freecyclesunnyvale v. The Freecycle Network, 626 F. 3d 509 (9th Cir. 2010).
“The open source nature of Firefox allows you to freely download and modify the Firefox source code. However, if you make any changes to Firefox, you may not redistribute that product using any Mozilla trademark without Mozilla’s prior written consent and, typically, a distribution agreement with Mozilla. For example, you may not distribute a modified form of Firefox and continue to call it Firefox.”

“The Firefox . . . official logos . . . are covered by a different license which is far too restrictive for Debian.” Mozilla also required pre-approval of patches as a condition of using Firefox name.

2016: “Mozilla recognizes that patches applied to Iceweasel/Firefox don’t impact the quality of the product . . . Mozilla trusts the Debian packagers to use their best judgment to achieve the same quality as the official Firefox binaries.”
Approval required in many circumstances, including for third-party uses limited to software included in the official Fedora repositories.

If guidelines followed, no prior permission to use Fedora mark on computer systems, virtual images pre-loaded with Fedora.

Can be used without permission to mark content derived from Fedora (e.g., modified software; combinations of Fedora and non-Fedora).

Use must clearly indicate that the work contains modified Fedora content or non-Fedora content. May not use phrases such as:

- "built from Fedora"
- "powered by Fedora"
- "contains Fedora"

https://fedoraproject.org/wiki/Legal:Trademark_guidelines
TRADEMARK POLICY

• Explain your approach to TM issues.
• What your trademarks are.
• Lay down the rules of the road, to avoid honest mistakes on the part of your users.
• Tell the public which uses you will tolerate / clarify the kinds of uses you will consider to be nominative/fair uses.
• Give users a channel to contact you to request greater permission.
Comodo, a direct competitor, filed three Let’s Encrypt-formative trademark applications.

At the time, we did not have a registered trademark, but had been common law trademark users since 2014 with substantial public recognition.

We and our lawyers asked them to withdraw applications; they refused.

They backed down after we publicly told the story of what was happening.
QUESTIONS?