

ZAPCHAT PROBLEM

Your client is ZapChat, a startup that provides an online social network combined with a platform for publishing and commenting on small bits of content posted by others. Think Facebook meets Twitter meets Tumblr. Unlike these Internet giants, which more or less tightly control how their content is organized and presented to users, ZapChat wants to focus on building a world-class infrastructure on its servers and on enabling interesting new kinds of semi-public/semi-private sharing. For example, it's currently testing out a feature called The Wave, which has been described to you as "Snapchat for retweets": each user can only see a post for ten seconds, but within that time, they can decide to propagate it to their own contacts, each of whom can see it for ten seconds and has the option to pass it along, and so on.

ZapChat is considering making its mobile client open source. The pitch is that doing so would enable independent developers to create a large ecosystem of innovative client software for ZapChat. This would free up ZapChat's own developers to work on its server infrastructure and implementing new features on the servers. But ZapChat would like to prevent the source code it releases from being used in clients that work with any of ZapChat's competitors, and it wants to ensure that all clients, however they are developed, respect ZapChat's terms of service and its privacy rules.

Can this be done with an existing open source license? With a new one? Do you see any other challenges? Is this a good idea?