

# Sustainable Open Source Technology Business Models

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# Principles without substance cannot last

Open source values need structural support to endure

# The types of “Open”



## Open Standards

Shared protocols keep systems interoperable



## Open Data

Transparency enables trust and accountability



## Open Source

Reusable code accelerates collective progress

## Dogmatic Openness

**Everything must be open**

Grants fund launches, not longevity

Services-only business models

Little incentive to innovate

Freeloading

## Faux Openness

**Open-washing**

Code is open but unusable

Community editions are limiting or poorly supported

Lack of documentation makes self-hosting impossible

# How do open source products stay alive?

What's the middle ground?

# Licenses: your first line of defense

## PERMISSIVE

**MIT · Apache**

Maximize adoption and reuse.

## COPYLEFT

**GPL · AGPL · CPAL**

Guarantee openness downstream.

# Dual Licensing

## CASE: MYSQL

Community uses a copyleft license freely.

Commercial users license proprietary integrations.

Maintains openness while funding ongoing stewardship.



## Support & Services

CASE: DHIS2

Software remains free to adopt and adapt.

Revenue comes from expertise, training, and deployments.

Strengthens local capacity alongside the tech.



# Open Core

CASE: AIRBYTE, GITLAB, DATABRICKS

Core capabilities stay fully open-source

Premium extensions fund focused innovation

Community and enterprise invest in the same roadmap



# Managed Hosting / SaaS

CASE: SUPABASE, WORDPRESS

Codebase remains open and self-hostable

Customers pay for convenience, uptime, and compliance

Transparency builds trust in mission-aligned sectors



# Hybrid Platforms

CASE: DOCKER, AVANDAR

Core infrastructure remains fully open-source.

DOCKER: Proprietary complementary tools but free to use.

AVANDAR: data moat, curated data is proprietary

Recurring revenue flows from subscriptions and cloud services.

# The Ethical Playbook

1. Be explicit about what is open and why.
2. License intentionally to support viability.
3. Ensure deployability. **Do not open-wash.**
4. Price transparently so value is understood.
5. Ensure the open version provides real value.
6. Share governance to practice openness beyond code.

Ethics + Sustainability = Durable Open Source

Durability keeps communities and missions alive.

# Open source must be durable to be ethical

Your software can't be ethical if it stops working

# Open source must be durable to be ethical



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