## Why doesn't your company contribute back to open source? [closed]

Asked 16 years ago Modified 15 years, 2 months ago Viewed 3k times



12





**Closed**. This question is <u>opinion-based</u>. It is not currently accepting answers.

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Closed 9 years ago.

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Contributing to open source can have many forms: working with issue trackers, patches, further development, documenting, funding, etc. Assuming your company uses open source projects, what is the single most important reason why you're not contributing back to the community?

open-source

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community wiki 5 revs, 3 users 90% krosenvold

We are. What a rude sounding question. – Will Dean Nov 25, 2008 at 12:48

No all fall in the same category. I work with TCS, and we do contribute to the community. -M.N Dec 1, 2008 at 8:59

## 16 Answers

Sorted by:

Highest score (default)





19



Developers cost us money. Open source does not cost us money. Hence, if we start giving developers time to work on open source software then open source loses its competitive advantage and we may as well give MS a call since at least we can define how much money they cost us upfront.



edited Nov 25, 2008 at 11:30

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answered Nov 25, 2008 at 11:25



If you use open source tools you can donate directly and at set costs. You don't have to only donate dev time. If you use tools those I would think giving back in some way is natural. And it isn't just cost. MS isn't going to give you source code. – Arthur Thomas Nov 25, 2008 at 20:56

@Arthur: So, who cares about source code? If we had time to really go through the source then why not design what we need in-house? – tloach Nov 26, 2008 at 15:55

thats not necessarily true. open source gives you the 15,000 lines of code you didn't have an you only need to add/change 2k lines now. Thats a big difference than starting from scratch and getting closer to a helpful custom app. Proprietary is usually all or none. – Arthur Thomas Dec 1, 2008 at 23:53

tloach, an example: when Google was developing their distributed file system, they made it as an overlay on top of Linux. At a few points, they had to make modifications to the Linux kernel. That was much cheaper than developing an OS from scratch, though! And of course, impossible to do with Windows. – SquareCog May 10, 2009 at 15:46

I personally don't disagree with what others here are saying, incidentally, I'm just giving arguments I've heard used. The companies I've worked for that have had a policy against contributing back have generally had it due to IP paranoia defended by a plethora of unrelated reasons. — tloach Nov 17, 2011 at 13:07



We do, we're founded on Open Source - but I guess we're special;)







Anyway, this is not like a true answer to your question, but rather an answer to the "questions" in the other answers I guess. There are many ways to contribute to Open Source. Sure you can contribute *code*, but the other thing you can contribute is *money* by donating. Jeff



Atwood (one of the founders of SO) did this a couple of months ago to a wiki system system I know.



When I worked for my previous startup we gave <u>WatiN</u> \$300. This is a contribution, and probably a both a better (and at least cheaper) contribution then having one of our coders trying to figure out the code model and coding standard etc behind WatiN and then fix some bug and supply a patch.

But the THIRD way to "contribute" to your favorite Open Source project is more subtle, but often the definitive *best* way you can contribute which is by giving it *attention* like I just did with WatiN through that link.

I am willing to be \$100 on that someone reading this answer will check out the link to WatiN, read about the project and download it and start using it in their own test suites. And they should since WatiN is a *great* Open Source project and Jeroen the guy behind it is truly helpful!

That is *also* contributing. Helping your favorite Open Source project get some attention by telling others how great it is!

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answered Nov 25, 2008 at 12:04



Ohh yeah, and when contributing by "giving attention" you don't need your boss approval or anything like that, you can

just do it as you wish in your own blogs, at some forum or at StackOverflow:) – Thomas Hansen Nov 25, 2008 at 12:05

Even submitting bug reports is contributing, since it gives the developers working on the project an idea of what areas of their software need work. – tloach Nov 25, 2008 at 14:14



10

We do contribute back to open source in the one situation where it would be pure insanity not to. When we fix bugs, we always ensure that they are pushed upstream.



As I say, it would be really insane to not do that, and have the alternative of maintaining a fork.



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answered Nov 25, 2008 at 12:36



Ali Afshar 41.6k • 12 • 97 • 110

Does your management know you are contributing?

- krosenvold Nov 25, 2008 at 12:38
- Yes. Maintaining forks is time-consuming, therefore expensive. And they love their money too much not to listen.
  - Ali Afshar Nov 25, 2008 at 12:48



Our management doesn't understand open source. I'm not sure that our boss understands that we are using OSS for development.



In the last time, our boss wanted to release some stuff as open source, but the package should be bundled with a





support-contract, so I don't believe he really knows what Open-Source means.

So in one sentence: we don't give back to open source because our management doesn't understand the concept behind open source.

**Update:** Now we have an OS-product, but our management do not understand it until today. Actually we did it, because some of our customers talked about open-source (and really meant *for free*).

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edited Jul 24, 2009 at 14:49

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answered Nov 25, 2008 at 11:49



Mnementh

**51.3k** • 48 • 151 • 202



We contribute back patches and bugfixes.



We don't generally start new projects, though. We don't really have the overhead to support such a project.



Unfortunately, you can't just post a tarball on a website and expect strangers to add features to your code. It



takes work to build a community.



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answered Nov 25, 2008 at 13:44



Eli

**5,600** • 1 • 31 • 27



Developer time/team resources, and the "appropriateness" of contributing code back.

4







Meaning that, if we make modifications to an OSS project, sometimes the changes aren't necessarily appropriate to contribute back to the project. This may be because of IP rights, but actually, the most common reason is that we simply don't anticipate that other people would require such specific modifications to the software in the way that we've made it. So generally speaking, such patches don't make sense to send back to the team developing the OSS project.

In other cases, these changes *could* be sent as a patch to the OSS project developers, but this would require cleaning up/reformatting the code, separating out private company data from the patch, etc. Usually, if we're using OSS software in the beginning, we don't care about such things, because most OSS software is somewhat dirty in terms of code quality anyways (ie, no test cases, coding standards, documentation, etc.). Therefore, the time required to clean up *our* dirty fixes to already dirty code is usually more time than we want to spend for the altruism factor here.

That said, I have worked at companies that *did* contribute back to OSS projects when necessary, and those that did not made monetary contributions to some OSS projects or distributions.













In my opinion the biggest problem is that most companies are doing development for projects. If a project develops something that is worthwhile to be published as open source the commitment for maintenance can only be given till the project is finished. After that no more resources are available for further developments, support of the community, bug fixes etc. This usually means a slow death for the open source "product".

Also, some companies are very eager to look at the PR for things they publish, and this usually means to go through all the processes for publications. This is something which in general overwhelms engineers and programmers.

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answered Nov 25, 2008 at 12:17





Getting it through legal. Seriously, even as a huge contributer to open source software, as a large company the bureaucracy is a killer. (Hope Legal don't read this:)



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answered May 17, 2009 at 1:41









The company I work for produces software that is proprietary and our software is highly specialized and is our major competitive advantage over all the other companies in our industry. Can't imagine why Open Source isn't something we encourage.



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answered Nov 25, 2008 at 20:53





HLGEM 96.4k • 15 • 119 • 189



What about a company that doesn't have developers? Maybe they're not a software group, and are using OSS to save money, *a la* a web-based group that uses LAMP, but never modifies any of the components?



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answered Nov 25, 2008 at 11:40



warren

**33.4k** • 23 • 89 • 128



Even if you don't have developers, you can a) donate to the project, b) "advertise" or simply "mention" the project on blogs/news pages etc c) be active on the project's forum (helping other users, sharing info) d) improving project's documentation... There are many ways to contribute!

Paulius Nov 25, 2008 at 14:11



2



In our case, we produce extremely customized software for the specific circumstances of a state office. Because of that, our software has no utility for anyone else. Being a state office, we aren't at liberty to "donate" time or money, either.



In theory, we could open-source some of our documentation, but again a lack of demand would make it nothing more than an empty gesture.

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answered Nov 27, 2008 at 2:13

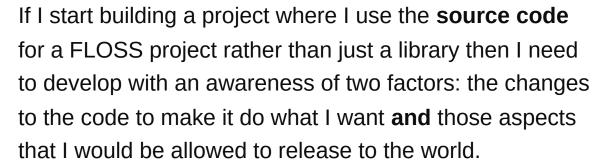




## Business logic.









Generally it's not that difficult to do this, but if deadlines are tight then I'm not going to 'waste' time stripping out our proprietary extensions.

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answered Nov 25, 2008 at 11:58

Unsliced

**10.5k** ● 8 ■ 52 ■ 81

I assume you are not talking about GPL as with that this mixing of proprietary source code with OS code is not allowed. – danio Nov 25, 2008 at 12:01

@danio: Yes it is. GPL only restricts distribution – Draemon Nov 25, 2008 at 12:43

And, at least in my case, I'm not developing for external distribution as everything I create is consumed by my company. – Unsliced Nov 25, 2008 at 13:40

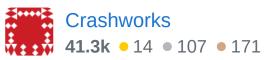


Programmers cost us money, but contributing to open source doesn't generate a cent of revenue.





answered Feb 16, 2009 at 21:09







In this case you shouldn't even think about (ab)using OpenSource code. – Martin Zeitler Aug 16, 2012 at 21:53



We do contribute and are very proud of it!



http://hg.nuxeo.org/opensocial is all about our contribution to Nuxeo from Leroy Merlin.



Ok, i doesn't generate a cent of revenue, but it doesn't really costs more. And when people will contribute to our



1

code (patches, bug fixes, extension), this will be code that will cost us nothing.

Moreover, our contribution is now included in the core feature of Nuxeo, so now we will benefit of a vendor certified integration of our code.

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answered Oct 6, 2009 at 7:50

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community wiki Damien Metzler



0



I am not sure contributing with money is the best way to help OpenSource software. When Jeff Atwood gave some \$5000 to an OpenSource project the lead of the project was grateful... but if I recall correctly he was not too sure about what to do with it.



1

Developers who contribute to OpenSource projects are not paid to do so. They do it because they like it, want to prove something to themselves, etc... but money is never the cause since they know that they won't probably earn a dime. At best, they might attract attention which may then generate revenues (think new employer, more traffic to their blog, etc...)

Now, I don't say that one should not contribute, but I think that monetary contributions are not as efficient as one might think, companies have a tendency to think that their model (capitalist) naturally extend to everything around them:/

In my opinion, an OpenSource project benefit more from patches/bug reports than from direct monetary contribution, exceptions being hosting the website / repository of the project or financing meetings for the top contributors so that they can discuss face to face when the need arise, but though this cost money, this is not directly giving money.

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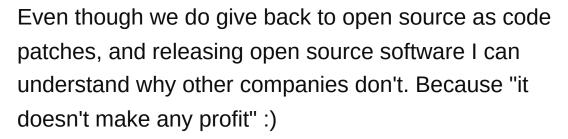
answered Oct 6, 2009 at 8:06

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0





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answered Oct 6, 2009 at 8:08



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community wiki dr. evil