

# 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



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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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edited Feb 16, 2009 at 20:52

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krosenvold

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We are. What a rude sounding question. – [Will Dean](#) Nov 25, 2008 at 12:48

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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

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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.



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[edited Nov 25, 2008 at 11:30](#)

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answered Nov 25, 2008 at 11:25



[tloach](#)

8,040 ● 1 ● 35 ● 44

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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

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@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

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- 2    that's not necessarily true. open source gives you the 15,000 lines of code you didn't have and you only need to add/change 2k lines now. That's 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

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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

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

17



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 [WatiN](#) \$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



[Thomas Hansen](#)

5,513 ● 1 ● 25 ● 28

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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

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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

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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

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[Ali Afshar](#)

41.6k ● 12 ● 97 ● 110

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Does your management know you are contributing ?

– [krosenvold](#) Nov 25, 2008 at 12:38

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- 3 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
- 



7

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



6



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

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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.

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answered Nov 25, 2008 at 11:35



**Nik Reiman**

40.3k ● 29 ● 107 ● 161



4



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

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**Andreas Kraft**

3,833 ● 1 ● 33 ● 40



4



Getting it through legal. Seriously, even as a huge contributor 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

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3



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



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[HLGEM](#)

96.4k ● 15 ● 119 ● 189



2



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



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[warren](#)

33.4k ● 23 ● 89 ● 128

- 1 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



J.T. Hurley

521 ● 9 ● 12



1



Business logic.

If I start building a project where I use the **source code** for a FLOSS project rather than just a library then I need to develop with an awareness of two factors: the changes to the code to make it do what I want **and** those aspects that I would be allowed to release to the world.

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

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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

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

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- 1 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
- 



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

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answered Feb 16, 2009 at 21:09



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[Crashworks](#)

41.3k ● 14 ● 107 ● 171



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

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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





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](#)



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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.



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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[Matthieu M.](#)



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Even though we do give back to open source as code patches, and releasing open source software I can understand why other companies don't. Because "it doesn't make any profit" :)



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answered [Oct 6, 2009 at 8:08](#)



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