

How to explain Open-Source to your boss? [closed]

Asked 15 years, 10 months ago Modified 11 years, 8 months ago

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19



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My boss was in the past not really interested in Open-Source. He always was fine, if we developers used a library or framework, that came at no cost. But he was never interested in details.

But some customers talked about Open-Source and so he got the idea, that such a thing exists. Recently he surprised us, because he wanted to make a talk to us about open-source and a open-source-strategy for our company.

So he told us about a system for licensing our software in the future. This system included registering for downloads

and that nobody was allowed to give the code to third parties and really no one is allowed to change the code without our permission. So I said that's fine but not open-source and he was a little unhappy about that.

The problem was, that he had really no idea, what open-source is. How do you would explain the concept of open-source to your boss?

Edit: I think my boss has a real problem to understand, that a community of developers **without** the strong lead of a company. As I see it, he thinks people working in private cannot produce some useful software.

Consequently he believed the Apache webserver and Linux were products by Sun. And he looked confused, as I explained that I could take the code from the Apache webserver, change some bits and release this changed webserver as an own product (with other words: make a fork).

I'm sure he don't really wants to release open-source, but he doesn't understand the idea of it, so I look for a way to explain it.

open-source

communication

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edited Apr 9, 2013 at 21:35



user1228

asked Jan 28, 2009 at 22:31

Mnementh

51.3k ● 48 ● 151 ● 202

No offense, but that isn't how you use commas man. – [Rayne](#)
Jan 28, 2009 at 23:07

Sorry, I'm from germany and not a native english-speaker. I
you show me the wrong commas, I will correct them.
– [Mnementh](#) Jan 28, 2009 at 23:55

9 Answers

Sorted by:

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9



[The Magic Cauldron](#) by Eric S. Raymond helped me to
understand the value of contributing to and/or starting an
open source project. It may help you explain the value
and decision variables to him.

Edit: The actual paper rather than just the abstract may
be found [here](#). Please respect the Copyright notice.

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edited Jan 28, 2009 at 23:45

Rob Wells

37k ● 13 ● 84 ● 147

answered Jan 28, 2009 at 22:37

John MacIntyre

13k ● 13 ● 69 ● 107



Try and get them to [The Cathedral and the Bazaar](#).

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answered Jan 28, 2009 at 22:38

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Jeb

16.7k ● 6 ● 36 ● 37



Isn't that book more about centralized vs. non-centralized development-model than about open-source? I know, he says Open-source usually embraces the Bazaar.

– [Mnementh](#) Sep 8, 2009 at 17:17



7



It sounds like your boss was describing a **source license** for your customers. This does have value of course, because it can give customers assurance that the code is high quality. They can do their own code inspection, security auditing, etc.



It can also be an alternative to putting source code in **escrow**. Some companies put copies of their code in storage, held by a third party so that in case your company goes bankrupt and disappears, the customer has some access to the code so they can take over maintenance in that event. The agreement between your company and the customer should include a clause for this. If you grant a source license to the customer, you can eliminate the third-party escrow service. You just include in the agreement that if your company evaporates, the customer has non-exclusive license to use and modify your code.

Open-source is different, in that **everyone** has a non-exclusive license to use and modify your code, as soon as you publish it. Your company continues to be healthy in the meantime. The users have to adhere to the terms of the license of course, which could add conditions for usage. GPL for example says any of the customer's modifications must also be made available under a compatible license. BSD, on the other hand does not require this.

Open source does not *necessarily* mean **free**. You can charge for code, even though it remains open source. Even GPL permits this. But it's a legitimate question, how can you control or enforce the license if the code is open source?

The best solution is that your business value is based on **service** or **access**, instead of simply the code. That is, if the customers are paying a subscription to a news feed, why not make the software that displays the news open source? In that business, maybe you even want the software to distributed widely for free, because it will entice more people to subscribe to your service.

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answered Jan 28, 2009 at 23:00

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Bill Karwin

561k ● 87 ● 698 ● 854



I think your boss might be suffering from buzz-word syndrome without understanding the goals (except "please the customers").

4



I think that what you should do is not try to explain open source, but rather talk to him about his business strategy (assuming he has control over it and you're a small shop).



If your business model relies on selling proprietary code that gives you a competitive advantage and is never shared with customers, then there is no reason to go open source.

If what you are developing has benefit for others, and your business can make revenue from offering services associated with the code, or if the product might be more successful if others can change or extend it, then open source might be relevant.

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answered Jan 29, 2009 at 0:06

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Uri

89.6k ● 51 ● 226 ● 322

Exactly, my boss suffering from buzz-word-syndrome. For my analysis we are in the middle of the models you described. We mostly sell applications once, specialized for the customer. So it would make sense to open-source some base-components in my eyes. But the boss decides about the strategy. – [Mnementh](#) Jan 29, 2009 at 0:19



2

The problem was, that he had really no idea, what open-source is. How do you would explain the concept of open-source to your boss?



We ship software so that every user can get under the hood, fix the things himself and post us a solution — for free.



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answered Jan 28, 2009 at 22:37

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[Quassnoi](#)

425k ● 93 ● 625 ● 619



Tell him it's a socialist idea and helps undermine "the man."

2

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answered Feb 1, 2009 at 17:08

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[Nosredna](#)

86k ● 16 ● 97 ● 123



Ow, that will help alot, that our boss tosses the idea of open-source in an instant. Funny answer. :-) – [Mnementh](#) Feb 1, 2009 at 17:40

I was only being funny to point out what you might be up against. You need to emphasize that Open Source is the new biggie, the new default, the new IBM (as in the old phrase "you never get fired for buying IBM"). Make closed-source seem dangerous and a surprising, losing choice. – [Nosredna](#) Feb 1, 2009 at 18:55

- 1 @Nosredna - Funny that you should make that comparison as IBM is one of the largest corporate supporters of open source. – [Jim Blizard](#) Mar 23, 2009 at 14:44



Let him read the wiki page about open source:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_source_software

1

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answered Jan 28, 2009 at 22:37



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Tom

948 ● 2 ● 7 ● 14



1

3rd-party access is one of the main purposes for open-source. The remaining distinctions deal with user notification, original author crediting, availability for sale, and some finer points I'm sure I've forgotten. ;)



There are licenses that limit who and how edits can be made -- particularly study licenses, that allow the source to be seen and studied but not altered.



But, regardless, limiting 3rd-party access is defiant of the definition of open-source -- openly available source code.

Alternatively, you may look into [Shared Source](#), instead (sounds more like what your boss is wanting).

It still involved 3rd-party access, but this has more of an allowance for denying unregistered access.

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edited Jan 28, 2009 at 22:53

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answered Jan 28, 2009 at 22:45



Jonathan Lonowski

123k ● 34 ● 202 ● 202



[Here you can find a great EBook](#) that explains how Open-Source works.

1



It helped me to understand why to spend time/work and how they finance those projects.



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answered May 18, 2009 at 12:25



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Xn0vv3r

18.2k ● 13 ● 60 ● 65