

Commit Copy

Source Story Worksheet

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Hello and welcome! Are you ready to tell your open-source story in a way that inspires spirited commitments from your customers, developers, and contributors?

This worksheet guides you through my Source Story Framework, which is how I research and assess companies' approaches to open-source strategy, prioritization, and advocacy. This framework is like running a `git reflow` on your company to unlock your open-source strategy and understand who's committed to you already.

When you're finished with this worksheet, you'll have a solid version of your company's Source Story, which you can hand out to your entire team. Think of it as a CI/CD check for how your employees & communities think, talk, and act on anything open-source.

I firmly believe every company built around open-source should publicly and repeatedly publish this kind of information on their websites, GitHub READMEs, Discord servers, Hacker News threads, and beyond.

This worksheet is your first step to having the proper Source Story to tell, no matter the venue.

The Source Story Framework

S → Source
O → Opinion
U → Users
R → Realization
C → Contribution
E → Ecosystem

Let's take a tour through the six parts of this framework, which will clarify exactly how your company uses open source.

You might find questions that you don't have answers to yet—that's okay! Not all open-source companies are built the same or use open source the same way, especially if you're just getting started.

The critical part here is that you're starting to think about these complex questions that will inevitably define the strength of the commitments you get from customers, developers, and contributors.

Source

If you're calling yourself an open-source business, you need to have clear and consistent answers on who you're trying to help with this community and ecosystem.

The biggest mistake you can make is positioning yourself as some benevolent code-Santa while extracting as much from volunteer contributors as possible and giving nothing back to the projects that make your company possible.

Your copywriting, marketing, and documentation should include transparent details about things like:

- { Which existing open-source tools do you integrate **with** to get the job done?
 - Does your company extend Kubernetes?
 - Is MongoDB a hard dependency for your self-hosted deployment?
- { How do you work **for** the greater good of open source?
 - Can your employees contribute to external projects on company time?
 - Do you give financial support to specific projects?
- { When do you build **on** open-source code, such as frameworks or stacks, to build and deploy your platforms or applications?
 - Does your company extend Kubernetes?
 - Is MongoDB a hard dependency for your self-hosted deployment?

WE BUILD WITH OPEN SOURCE TO:

WE BUILD FOR OPEN SOURCE TO:

WE BUILD ON OPEN SOURCE TO:

Opinions

You can't be in open source without some strong opinions about the value it creates. Whether you're a free-software movement die-hard, or just love the product<>developer experience feedback loops that an open-source project creates, your various communities will want to know that you have core philosophies that match their own.

It's the same idea as consumers rejecting businesses that use "greenwashing" rather than genuinely sustainable business practices. Drill down into your beliefs and be honest about them—don't become the "FauxSS" company!¹

WE USE OPEN SOURCE IN OUR BUSINESS BECAUSE:

WE THINK THESE DEVELOPERS, COMPANIES, AND COMMUNITIES HAVE BUILT PARTICULARLY SUSTAINABLE AND TRANSPARENT OPEN-SOURCE ECOSYSTEMS:

¹ Credit goes to Rich Harris of Svelte for this clever moniker for the sometimes sneaky businesses behind our favorite open-source projects.

Users

Every company has many different types of users, but open-source companies have more than normal. You have your users—the customers, developers, and contributors who use your code, application, or service—but you also have users of open-source software **inside** your workforce.

You have advocates, believers, and people who are active in communities that aren't your own. Here's where you start to define all the people who use open-source in and around your company and community.

- { Who are the advocates for open source in the company?
- { Who has the power to sign off on major contributions to an external open-source project?
- { Do customers pick you **because** you're open source?
- { Which employees use open-source software in their day-to-day jobs? Do your marketing folks use open-source software? Your accountants?

WE USE OPEN SOURCE IN OUR BUSINESS BECAUSE:

THE PEOPLE OUTSIDE OUR COMPANY WHO CARE MOST ABOUT OUR INVOLVEMENT IN OPEN SOURCE ARE:

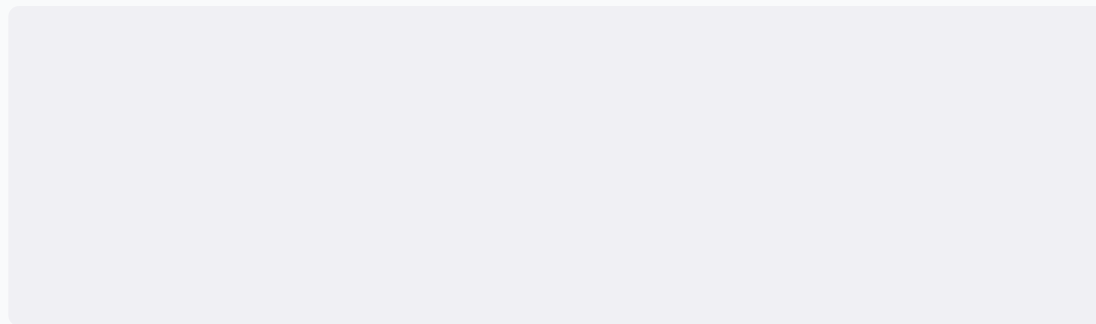
Realization

Your company is headed someplace big. That's exciting! But when open source is in the mix, it's not enough to say that you're trying to make a buck or two. If you want the kinds of commitments that grow open-source companies, you need to plot this path and be ready with trust-building answers for your various audiences.

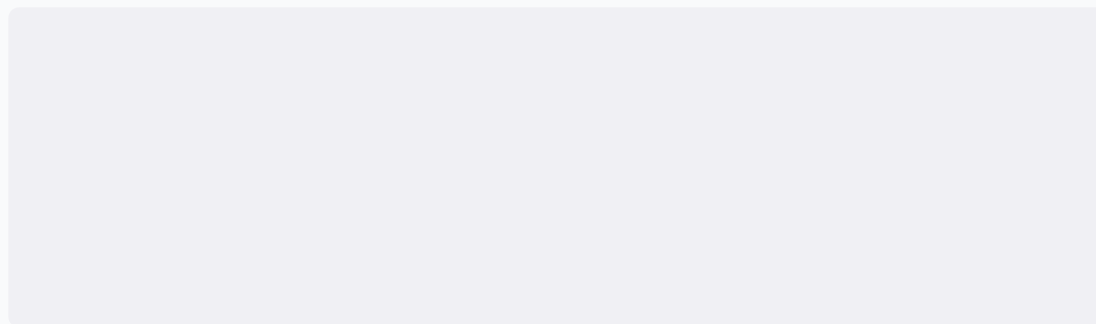
So... what are you trying to do?

- { Get to Series A [or B, C, D]?
- { Spin off your project into a self-governing community?
- { Join the CNCF Sandbox and eventually become a graduate?
- { Get acquired [or acqui-hired] by Google, AWS, Netlify, Vercel, &&?

SUCCESS FOR MY COMPANY LOOKS LIKE:



THE ROLE OF OPEN SOURCE IN THAT SUCCESS IS:



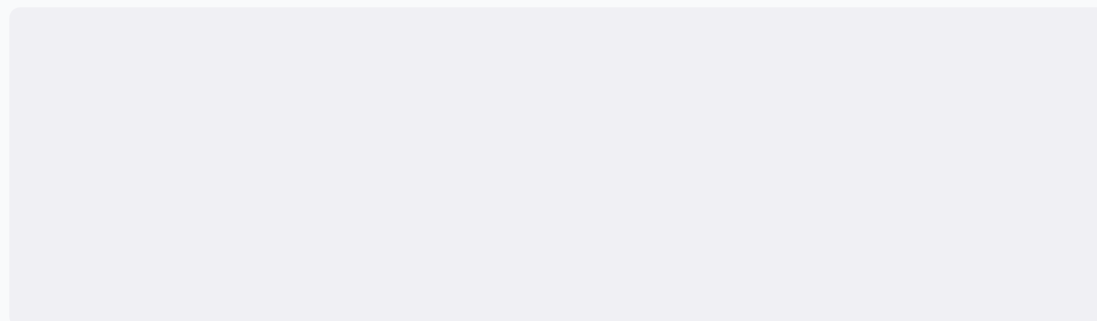
Contribution

The most important question in open source isn't what license you use or whether you require the imperative mood during code commits or pull requests. It's a line straight out of a thriller film full of double-crosses and espionage: "Who are you working for?"

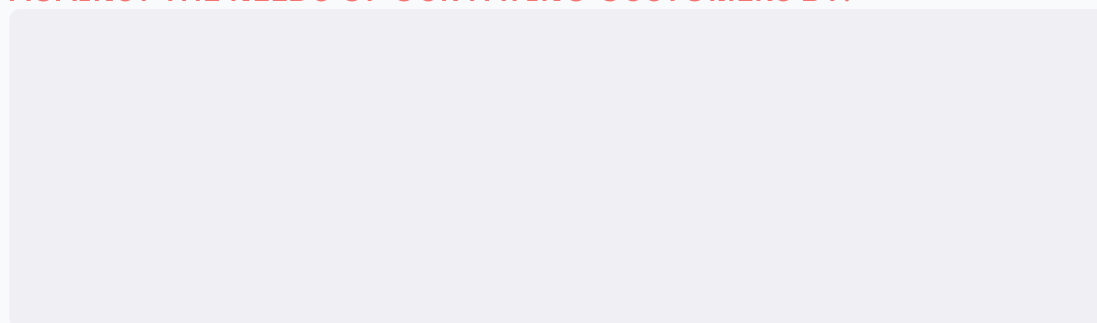
The unique value proposition of open source is that anyone can contribute to a common goal. If you're building in and around these communities, you shouldn't be surprised that your audiences want to know precisely how they can pitch in, too. And you also shouldn't be surprised when they want to know you aren't just going to ignore their voluntary efforts—or worse, absorb them into your closed-source cloud offering without so much as a mention in the release notes.

- { Are code contributions a priority for your company?
- { Can would-be contributors follow comprehensive documentation to guide them through the entire process?
- { What license do you use, and how does that affect contributions?

IF A DEVELOPER WANTS TO CONTRIBUTE CODE TO OUR PROJECTS, THEY CAN:



WE BALANCE THE NEEDS OF OUR OPEN-SOURCE COMMUNITY AGAINST THE NEEDS OF OUR PAYING CUSTOMERS BY:



Joel Hans

the open-source copywriter

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Ecosystem

At this point, we're past talking about your company or your products, services, or projects. An essential part of your Source Story is clarifying just how good of an open-source citizen you are. Are you giving back as much (or more!) than you take? Giving as many details as possible about your efforts will absolutely create deeper commitments from the customers, developers, and communities that make your open-source company.

- { Do you donate to any non-profits, foundations, or specific projects in open source? How much do you donate per year?
- { Are your employees not only allowed, but encouraged, to contribute to external projects? What kinds of systems do you have in place to ensure this happens?

IF A DEVELOPER WANTS TO CONTRIBUTE CODE TO OUR PROJECTS, THEY CAN:

WE BALANCE THE NEEDS OF OUR OPEN-SOURCE COMMUNITY AGAINST THE NEEDS OF OUR PAYING CUSTOMERS BY:


```
git add .  
git commit "Finish the the Source Story Worksheet"  
git push origin copywriting
```

Congratulations! You've just deployed the first draft of your company's Source Story. Most open-source companies never even get this far. Take a moment to celebrate! You know, make yourself a fresh pot of coffee instead of microwaving the old stuff.

You now have 10x more depth and consistency to the way you think about how your company approaches and benefits from building with, for, and on open source.

Your TODOs are simple:

1. Send me a copy of your worksheet at joel@commitcopy.com! I'd love to see what you came up with (and no, I won't pitch you by email after the fact... you can read that below!).
2. Share this worksheet with your team—especially anyone in marketing, DevRel, community, and customer success—to start building consistent open-source messaging wherever your communities are.

Need some help putting your Source Story into action on your website, product pages, landing/sales pages, documentation, and beyond?

Hi! I'm Joel Hans, the open-source copywriter. I help open-source companies & startups turn git clone into spirited commitments from their customers, developers, and contributors. And I love tagging along as they build future-enriching products with transparency.

After years working for open-source companies, I figured out exactly where and how they fail to explain their relationship to open source carefully and completely. I realized that they need to be overly explicit about the relationship between open source and money. When they failed to do so, miscommunications with contributors became rifts, which, unlike a merge conflict, couldn't be resolved. And even worse, I watched as silence destroyed once-thriving communities and turned customers away.

I now focus entirely on the complex relationship between open-source businesses and their various audiences. I believe that when companies are truly transparent about what they're building, why they're doing it with open source, and how they're giving back to the ecosystem, they'll stand out and grow in amazing ways.

Ready to dig into your Source Story and get spirited commitments? Let's talk!

[Learn more about my Source Story strategy and Commit-Ready Copy packages](#)

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