

15 most powerful OpenStack companies

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OpenStack is no one company, it's a community and these are its most important members

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OpenStack at its core is an open source project - it's free code. But what makes OpenStack come alive are the vendors that have contributed to make that raw code and then turned it into a product businesses can use. Some companies have used OpenStack as the basis for their public clouds; Rackspace, for example, has proven that OpenStack can power a massive, geographically distributed cloud. Others are packaging the components that make up OpenStack into an easy-to-digest product sold to enterprises for building their own private cloud. Our list of the top 15 OpenStack companies is not scientific - it's based on which companies have devoted the most resources to OpenStack, which have contributed the most code to the project, and which have the greatest ability to spread this open source platform into the market more broadly.

Company: Rackspace

Why they're important: Rackspace is an OpenStack founding father. The company started OpenStack officially, along with NASA in 2010. The company contributed the original storage pieces while NASA had the computing side. Rackspace managed the project for the first two years before the OpenStack Foundation was established. Since then Rackspace is still seen largely as the public face of OpenStack and to this day the company is one of the most ardent and supportive backers of OpenStack. The company uses OpenStack as the basis for much of its public cloud and it offers customers a distribution of the software to create a private and hybrid cloud based on the same platform. The public cloud and managed hosting provider is one of the first to roll out new OpenStack features in production, and it provides one of the most robust public cloud deployments. Rackspace acts as an ongoing proven example that OpenStack can power a globally distributed massive scale public cloud. It seems that as long as there is OpenStack, Rackspace will be an important and relevant player in the community.

Company: Red Hat

Why they're important: Red Hat made its first billion dollars productizing Linux for the enterprise. Now, it wants to do the same for OpenStack. The company has invested heavily in the project. According to [StackAnalytics](#), it is the leading contributor to OpenStack code among vendors for the Icehouse release.

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Red Hat has its own distribution of OpenStack, which is integrated deeply with its flagship product, Red Hat Enterprise Linux and is called RHEL OpenStack. Red Hat has contributed many resources to OpenStack, so it is expected to be a player in this market for the long haul.

Company: Dell

Why they're important: Dell has had fits and starts in the cloud, but one thing has remained clear: It's commitment to OpenStack. The company originally had plans to build a public cloud based on OpenStack. But, it scraped those plans and instead is now focusing on delivering consulting and implementation services for customers, undoubtedly with a heavy dose of Dell hardware and services on top of it all.

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Dell says it wants to help customers deploy whatever is best for them. That could be a private cloud built on OpenStack, or connections to one of the company's public cloud partners, like Joyent or Rackspace. Dell holds some important leadership positions in the OpenStack governance bodies, so it is certainly a force in the OpenStack community.

Company: HP

Why they're important: HP seems to be having trouble getting its cloud to catch on. The company has an impressive portfolio though. Its public cloud is based on OpenStack - with plenty of HP sauce layered on top.

And that same OS is available to customers to run a private cloud, also leveraging OpenStack. Combined, HP says that creates a hybrid cloud for customers that rivals similar platform-centric plays from companies like VMware and Microsoft. In the Icehouse release HP trailed only Red Hat in terms of the number of contributions of code. So, HP is certainly among the big vendors in the OpenStack community.

Company: IBM

Why they're important: Last year [IBM publicly announced](#) that OpenStack would be a central part of the company's cloud plans moving forward. Since then, though it's unclear just how big of a part OpenStack plays in the company's cloud plans. IBM has certainly been committed to contributing toward the development of OpenStack. IBM is one of the leading contributors to the project, along with every other company on this list. IBM is using its experience in working with enterprise customers to improve areas such as quality assurance and aligning the OpenStack API to key standards. But, the company has not made OpenStack central to its own products it sells. IBM bought SoftLayer, an IaaS provider, and is in the process of expanding OpenStack support in SoftLayer's cloud. Since that OpenStack announcement IBM has also made commitments to Cloud Foundry, another open source project for application development. And it has announced BlueMix, a PaaS offering that's still in its early stages.

Company: Cisco

Why they're important: It seems that the main goal of Cisco being involved in OpenStack is to ensure that the hardware the company makes - its networking, converged infrastructure and servers - are all compatible with OpenStack. Cisco also plays an important role on the leadership and marketing efforts, lending the head of its cloud technology team to be vice chairman of the OpenStack board of directors and sharing stories of how the company's WebEx team has deployed OpenStack within the company. It's yet to be seen how central of a role OpenStack will play in the company's recently announced [InterCloud](#).

Company: Mirantis

Why they're important: A number of companies have sprouted up as pure-play OpenStack vendors that focus solely on supporting and selling OpenStack-related products and services. Embracing this strategy has helped Mirantis, a Mountain View, Calif.-based company grow from a venture-backed startup to now one that has more than 400 employees. The company originally supported a variety of OpenStack deployment models, but as the open source project has matured, so too has Mirantis's offerings. The company now has its own distribution of OpenStack which users can implement on their own, or with the support of Mirantis engineers. The company is also building up its partnerships, including those announced with Red Hat, VMware and it recently publicized a \$30 million deal, which was accompanied by an investment, from mobile provider Ericsson to implement a cloud for that company.

Company: Cloudscaling

Why they're important: One of the most outspoken leaders of the OpenStack community is Randy Bias, CEO and co-founder of OpenStack company Cloudscaling, and a member of the OpenStack board of directors. This company focuses solely on building clouds for its customers based on OpenStack technology. Unlike other companies though, Bias is not afraid to share his thoughts that enterprise clouds should operate like those from Amazon Web Services and Google. That's the philosophy Cloudscaling has taken to building its products, which use the OpenStack code to implement the strategy.

Company: Piston Cloud Computing Co.

Why they're important: Like Mirantis and Cloudscaling, Piston Cloud Computing Co. is a pure-play OpenStack company. Founder and CTO Joshua McKenty is one of the original developers of OpenStack dating back to his days at NASA. Now, McKenty and his team have taken the OpenStack code they helped create and turn it into a packaged software used to build private clouds. If an end user took the OpenStack code and attempted to install it, it would be difficult because there are a lot of choices that have to be made about exactly how it should be configured. McKenty, who now sits on the OpenStack board of directors, likes to say that it has done all that legwork for its customers and created a platform that's easy to install, upgrade and manage.

Company: Canonical

Why they're important: The battle to control OpenStack is now being duked out by companies that made their name originally on Linux. Red Hat is the most prime example of that, but Canonical through its Ubuntu operating system has been integrating OpenStack features into its OS. Canonical is now one of the major OpenStack companies. In a survey of OpenStack users conducted by the OpenStack Foundation last year, it found that Canonical's Ubuntu was the leading operating system for OpenStack deployments. Canonical's latest release of Ubuntu 14.04 focuses heavily on [integrating OpenStack](#).

Company: SUSE

Why they're important: Like Red Hat and Canonical, SUSE - which has its own Linux distribution - is playing in the OpenStack game too. Perhaps most notably, SUSE's cloud executive serves as the chairman of the OpenStack board of directors. SUSE has created a packaged distribution of OpenStack.

Company: Nebula

Why they're important: Nebula is in the category along with Mirantis, Cloudscaling and Piston, but it is taking a slightly different approach. While those companies are all primarily software vendors, Nebula has taken an approach of integrating hardware and software together, using OpenStack, to sell customers a complete turnkey solution. Nebula founder and Chief Strategy Office Chris Kemp is somewhat of an OpenStack celebrity who is widely quoted as one of the fathers of the project from his time at NASA, and now is one of the most prominent evangelists for the open source project in general.

Company: VMware

Why they're important: VMware and OpenStack? VMware has what could be viewed as somewhat of a love/hate relationship with OpenStack. Fundamentally, OpenStack can be seen as a threat to VMware, as an open source alternative to VMware's products for building and managing clouds. OpenStack is basically a free version of software that accomplishes the same thing that VMware's software does. VMware says that it wants customers to be able to manage their OpenStack clouds using VMware's tools, including its ESX hypervisor. On the networking front, the company's acquisition of [Nicira](#) two years ago automatically launched VMware into being a major OpenStack company. This is an evolving relationship.

Company: Metacloud

Why they're important: Metacloud is yet another pure-play OpenStack company that has built a service on top of OpenStack. Unlike Mirantis, Piston or Cloudscaling though, Metacloud has taken an approach where the company sells managed private clouds based on OpenStack. That means that the hardware Metacloud provides customers sits on their own premises behind their own firewall, but is fully managed by Metacloud. It's a convenience of a hosted solution with the peace of mind of an on-premises private cloud.

The end users

Why they're important: At the end of the day there can be lots of vendors selling OpenStack. But if OpenStack really catches on, it will be because there are end users - not vendors - who have adopted it. There are a variety of other companies that are important to the OpenStack ecosystem because they are some of the projects' earliest production deployments of the software. Organizations like CERN, the European scientific group, are one of the first major deployments of OpenStack. Officials with the organization are now leading up an end user committee associated with the OpenStack board of directors. Other companies like Yahoo, Ericsson, AT&T, the GAP, PayPal/EBay and Comcast have all spoken about their use of OpenStack. For the open source project to really break into the enterprise, more stories from end users like these will help to convince the Fortune 2000 companies of the world that OpenStack is ready for them to use.