



Sustainable to Profitable Open Source and Why You Should Join the Culture

Description

The "cancer" that became a cornerstone of industry the modern day entrepreneur cannot ignore, the impact of open source, and by open source, we use the term to mean giving away freebies as an organization, not just software, but sharing with a community, we just choose the phrase "open source" to pay homage to the industry that mostly started it all. A lot of the models discussed are narrated from a software perspective as well but with a little imagination can be applied to any business.

The culture of giving freebies has grown significantly to beyond just free products. Over the years, open source has grown to include;

1. Platforms to collaborate and share resources, like [Github](https://github.com),
2. Sharing of knowledge on technologies, particularly on products that companies provide, like the [HubSpot Academy](https://www.hubspot.com/academy),

It's definitely a good time with the space being held by multiple players, big, small and individuals, but the quality of open source products is impressive as well. This is seemingly an oxymoron. One would expect that with freebies sprouting everywhere, quality would decline, but the truth is money can be made from freebies, more specifically an open source culture, and companies definitely do.

This article from [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_source) has a comprehensive list of models for monetizing open source, but here we discuss a few that are applicable to broader business types.

These methods include:

Donations/ Investments

Now even if you don't intend to profit from your project, you'll still need revenue to keep the coffee flowing and the lights on, so you have to figure a way to keep funds flowing in. One way is to borrow a page from one of our favourite open source platforms, the Mozilla Foundation and all its related networks, <https://www.mozilla.org/en-US/>. Build a very strong core product and have your

community invest in its continued upkeep. Because of your invaluable donations and investments, the mission for an open web continues with products like Firefox and we hope you continue to contribute.

Other projects like [Lets Encrypt](#) create important products that are aligned with the products of profitable organizations and get strong donations from them. By providing free encryption in a web now riddled with malicious attacks, Let's Encrypt is supported by leading tech companies such as Google and CISCO.

Donations of Knowledge Skill and Effort

Like already stated, on collaboration platforms like [Github](#), you can open up your code for forking, further development or bug resolution. While this model might not be the best to maximize income, it is perfect for ensuring the quality of your open source product at low cost. One developer that uses this model to perfection is the developer of [Atom](#), an exceptional source code editor that is totally open for edit.

By opening up their code, companies can improve the quality of their internal applications at little to no cost, reducing operational costs, which is a way of improving ROI. On the [Mozilla Developer Network](#), the ability to donate is taken to a whole new level, you can even contribute articles, proofing and translations.

Open Your Code to Develop Commitment

While this method lends itself to Donations of Knowledge Skill and Effort, it deserves special mention, being an invaluable and free marketing technique to develop a cult following for your product. Common in the gaming industry, with a practice known as modding, which;

refers to the act of modifying hardware, software, or virtually anything else, to perform a function not originally conceived or intended by the [designer](#), or achieve a [bespoke](#) specification, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modding>,

game franchises such as GTA develop good followings, increase adoption, fix bugs and expand the lifetime of their games through modding.

Develop Vertical Adoption

It's very common for visionaries to change the world with products truly ahead of their time, and for us mere mortals, these technologies may be very tough to adopt but very vital to our competitiveness. A good example is the advent of [Hadoop](#), from the [Apache](#) Foundation, (Another open source organization in our hearts) to help us deal with big data. The problem, Hadoop and its ecosystem is very complex like the big data it handles. The result is a multitude of very profitable organizations have sprouted to help us adopt Hadoop, and they are not shy to show their appreciation with donations.

Freemium

Choice. That's the norm for the modern consumer, choice. There are an estimated [more than 2.8 million applications](#) in the Android store alone, leading to the proliferation of searches like best this and highest rated that, the long and the short, referrals have become all too important. But how do you get referrals without adoption, give the people the product to use free, then have them share their great experiences. Once they are hooked, you sell them other stuff inside the software. You solve adoption issues and earn income simultaneously. Speaking of the Google play store, that's how most applications make their money in there. But our favourite example is a little closer to home, the free accounting software from [Zoho Books](#), which we use free for basic functions with some paid tax features.

Use Open Source to Develop Your Own Market

Remember how at times you can be too ahead of the curve, "open source" can be a great way to ensure adoption of paradigm-shifting technologies. This is where the beauty of knowledge sharing really shines through. When big data came through, it was a puzzle and mystery for everyone, with very few understanding it and its application, but thanks to the [Google Analytics Academy](#), web analytics is slightly less so now, more adopted, and this could be the reason why the [Google Analytics suite](#), is so widely adopted.

Competition

The value of open source can be in allowing you to catch up with the competition. For any business, we know when you arrive late to the field it can be tough to catch up, but freebies can definitely be invaluable in helping you close the gap. The most cited example is the introduction of Android as open source by Google to catch up to Apple in the mobile space, and that move paid dividends. Not only has Google managed to overtake Apple in the mobile OS space, they now have a flagship mobile device, on the back of this solid operating system.

Top Mobile Operating Systems Chart

Conclusion

Open source is here to stay as a culture and unlike the original prognosis of a "cancer", it is actually definitely beneficial to business and progress. Because of open source, more organisations have access to resources, knowledge, there are more entrepreneurial opportunities and the quality of products is improving perennially. Open source is, therefore, a culture your organisation should join, you just have to figure how you fit into the ecosystem.

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Date Created

November 25, 2017

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Mut-Con blog