

# The Business Case for Free and Open Source Software (FOSS)

There are several strong business cases for **using** Free and Open Source Software (*FOSS*) technologies, **leveraging** Open Source methodologies, and for **developing** Open Source software.

**Using** Free and Open Source technologies often provides the following benefits:

- **Robust and proven technologies** – Open Source technologies such as Apache and Linux have been driving forces behind the Internet for many years. Over 60% of Web sites are run on Apache [1] and over 75% of the top supercomputers in the world run Linux [2].
- **Scalability of your business** – With FOSS you can rapidly gear up your infrastructure to respond to market shifts without have to pay out huge sums of cash. This is particularly useful for small and growing businesses, and also for seasonal businesses.
- **A flexible solution** – FOSS runs on many architectures (from supercomputers to phones) and is completely configurable. This means you can wrap your technology solution around your business, rather than having to wrap your business around the technology. Modify FOSS to do exactly what you want it to do, without compromise.
- **Interoperability** – Having different systems work together seamlessly sounds like a nice dream to many administrators and IT Managers. One of the important aspects of FOSS is that it is usually built on **Open Standards** [7]. Open Standards means openly published and recognised standards, such as protocol or data formats. Open Standards ensure that various applications, operating systems, and entire systems can communicate and exchange information in a way that is useful.
- **Greater strategic control** – Because there is no single vendor in FOSS, and as the code is openly available, you have greater strategic control and bargaining leverage than if there is only one supplier. It means you can bargain for the quality of service you wish rather than dealing with a status quo. It also means you can not be locked into to artificial software upgrade cycles and that you can make more efficient use of your hardware for longer.
- **Lower licensing and management costs** – FOSS doesn't have a licence fee, although some products have optional support and subscription fees. FOSS also runs on multiple architectures, meaning that you can consolidate your operating systems; and due to good virtual machine options, you can also consolidate your hardware. With Linux in particular, you can run multiple services on one stable system, rather than having to split them out.
- **Simplified risk management** – FOSS has very few viruses. This is largely a result of technology that was built with networking and the Internet in mind and thus designed from the ground up with better network protection. Because the development is done in the open, potential security flaws are found and fixed quickly in the public eye, which means that you can always know what is going on. This brings a level of transparency and accountability that cannot be matched by proprietary software.
- **More efficient staff** – It has been found that although Linux administrators are on average more expensive than Windows administrators, the average Linux administrator could maintain 44 boxes while a Windows administrator could only manage 10 [3].

**Leveraging** Open Source methodologies often provides the following benefits:

- **More efficient software development** – FOSS has shown us a new and more efficient way to develop software. Using these methodologies within your own environment or leveraging the FOSS development community can both offer serious cost and time benefits for anyone writing software,

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whether it is for an in-house bespoke application or for the market.

- **Professional development for your engineers** – By encouraging your engineers to participate in FOSS and the FOSS community, they can learn a tremendous amount, become better at troubleshooting and finding information, and also rub shoulders with the best developers and administrators in the world. This can empower them to get ahead of the flock and provide superior service for your organisation and clients.
- **A competitive edge in the market** – By leveraging FOSS technologies, you can get ahead of the market by offering equal or superior products for a lower price. Basically, you are lowering the starting price of your product by leveraging existing and free products as part of your offering. It also means all the business case reasons for FOSS work for your offering.

**Building on and Releasing** Open Source Software often provides the following benefits:

- **Proliferation of your software** – FOSS products have the opportunity to get more use by other agencies and by the public. Consequently, the amount of feedback, bug reports and suggested improvements is likely to boost the development cycle significantly.
- **Agency reputation** – Participating in FOSS development, by either working within an existing Open Source project or by releasing your own code, can help boost an agency profile, and may even enable it to set standards in the case where the software has been widely adopted.
- **Transparent e-Government** – Releasing core components as FOSS increases the transparency of the business processes underpinned by the software. This means the outcomes can be trusted, and the software predictable. Modelling results, for instance, can then be verified openly, ensuring good and trustworthy research and e-Government process.
- **Stakeholder benefits** – Releasing software to stakeholders is likely to contribute to visible impacts in their business. The organisation that has developed the software is then better positioned strategically in terms of having achieved real outcomes as opposed to simple outputs.
- **Commercial viability** – By Open Sourcing your software, you give a broad range of groups the opportunity to participate in feature contributions. This often means that you will have a cross industry approach, features that are useful beyond just your use-case, and thus a higher commercial relevance of the project.
- **New ideas and collaborations** – Open Source projects give individuals and companies a window to improving your project, and to bring new ideas to the table. This collaborative approach also gives you valuable contacts who share common aims, which is useful for future projects and collaborations.

## References

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