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# The State of Commercial Open Source 2026

## Proven Strategic Insights from Founders and Business Leaders



**November 2026**

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# The State of Commercial Open Source 2026

## AI makes open core even more open.

COSS strategy is largely resilient to AI. When adaptation is needed, increased openness is 2x more likely than proprietary retreat.

## Open core commercializes capabilities that gain value at scale.

Enterprise integrations, advanced analytics, and compliance functionality are reserved for customers.

## Investors favor open core scalability.

VC funded COSS companies are 40% more likely to use open core than peers without VC backing.

## COSS companies have no single origin story.

71% of companies created their own OSS project while 18% fork an existing OSS project.

## Capitalize on AI tailwinds.

Leverage AI to amplify value, as 72% of COSS firms see it as a net positive: improved internal productivity and increased business opportunities.

## Reallocate talent to AI.

Rather than changing overall headcount, COSS companies are allocating more internal resources toward AI roles.

## Invest in community trust.

Prioritize brand recognition and community trust to secure the top competitive advantage in COSS.

## Combine monetization strategies.

The four main COSS business models are support services, cloud & managed services, open core, and dual licensing. Most companies use multiple.

## Stack GTM motions.

Layer direct sales onto your foundation rather than abandoning PLG as you scale. Pair self-serve product growth with sales assistance to outpace pure-play models.

## Prioritize enterprise sales.

Invest early in enterprise sales capabilities to overcome the primary scaling bottleneck.

## Leverage and measure COSS customer conversion efficiency.

4 out of 5 COSS companies recoup customer acquisition costs and convert OSS users to customers within 12 months.

## Sell to two people, not one.

Practitioners use COSS but technical leadership approves the spend.

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# Foreword

Around the world, open source has become one of the most powerful forces shaping how new technology reaches the people who build with it. Open source AI startups, companies built around an open source project, sit right at the heart of that shift. The project earns developers' trust and adoption in the open, and that momentum becomes the foundation of a real business.

When I talk to open source AI founders today, the same pattern comes up again and again. Their open source project is what wins developers first, and they need a path that turns that adoption into a product enterprises can buy. They want to do this without disappearing into infrastructure work they never wanted to own, and without losing the openness that earned them their community in the first place.

That's where AWS can help, and where we're investing to back the next generation of open source startups. With Amazon Bedrock and the broader AWS offerings, founders can run the commercial, managed version of their open source project in production and reach enterprise customers through AWS. The same project that drives developer adoption becomes their route to revenue. We see it already at companies like Cake, Deepset, Qdrant, Temporal, and Weaviate which each pair an open source project with a commercial offering customers run and buy through AWS. Deepset's open source Haystack framework, for example, is used by more than 90,000 organizations and powers a commercial platform. Similarly, Qdrant followed its own open source community to AWS and cut its total costs by more than 30 percent. It's the kind of path that lets founders stay open, stay nimble, and pour their energy into what truly sets them apart rather than undifferentiated heavy lifting.

**Stormy Peters**
Head of Open Source,
*Amazon Web Services*

# Executive summary

The **2025 edition of this report** established that commercial open source is a superior financial strategy: COSS companies raise faster, at higher valuations, and exit higher than closed-source peers. This year's study examines how they operate. We surveyed 225 COSS founders and enterprise leaders on pricing, revenue models, licensing, go-to-market, conversion economics and AI.

**AI.** 72% of companies report a net positive impact, driven by internal productivity (73%) ahead of expanded TAM (46%) and new monetization levers (39%). 43% report no change to their open source strategy; among those that adapt, 23% open more of the core against 13% that close it. AI-related roles are the only headcount category with clear net growth. AI-native companies share the same commercial playbook as the rest of COSS, differentiating mainly in go-to-market emphasis.

**Monetization.** The median company runs two revenue models; 33% run three or more. Support and professional services is the most widely used (63%) and most often the largest revenue line (38%). Managed cloud grows with scale, from 35% of companies below $5M ARR to 66% above $20M. Open core is used by 43% of companies, but only 19% of those run it as a pure play. Usage-based pricing dominates (46%) and rises with maturity, from 35% early-stage to 52% late-stage.

**Open core.** For the 43% who take this path, reserved capabilities are overwhelmingly those that acquire value at organizational scale: enterprise integrations (63%), SLAs (63%), advanced analytics (49%) and audit/compliance (48%). Collaboration features are the least gated — companies do not charge for the mechanism by which a tool spreads. The median open core company reserves four of eleven capabilities.

**Go-to-market.** Motions stack rather than substitute. Product led growth (PLG) holds nearly 50% of companies at every stage, while 57% of companies above $20M ARR run at least two motions, against 40% below $5M. 74% of late-stage companies run enterprise or channel-led sales. Building enterprise sales capability is the most cited scaling challenge (47%) and the top priority for the next two years (45%). Users are practitioners; buyers are executives, with CTO/VP Engineering approving the spend in 46% of cases.

**Conversion.** Among companies that track it, 79% recover customer acquisition costs within 12 months and 77% convert from first OSS usage to paid contract within a year. Tracking itself is patchy: 38% do not measure free-to-paid conversion, 42% do not measure time to first contract, and 25% do not measure CAC payback.

**Licensing.** Permissive terms remain the default at every stage (64% overall), but copyleft adoption rises from 27% of early-stage companies to 43% at late stage, and source-available terms from 15% to 25%.



**Matthieu Lavergne**
*Serena*

# Introduction

## How do you build a successful company around an open source project?

The answer to that question does not exist in the public record. Financing and exit data can be observed from the outside; pricing decisions, gating choices and go-to-market sequencing cannot.

So we asked the operators directly. This report draws on a survey of 225 COSS founders and enterprise leaders covering pricing and revenue models, what open core companies hold back, licensing posture, GTM motions, discovery channels, conversion economics, and the influence of AI on all of them.

Three main findings shape the report:

**AI is a net positive, and it's pushing companies to open up.** Seventy-two percent of respondents report a net positive impact from AI, against 8% negative. So far, the gains show up mostly inside companies. Internal productivity is the most cited benefit (73%), ahead of market expansion (46%) and new monetization opportunities (39%). AI roles are the only hiring category growing on net. COSS strategy is mostly unchanged by AI. But when companies do adapt, they are  nearly twice as likely to open more of their core product rather than become more closed.

**Brands sell trust, and charge for it in layers.** When asked what sets them apart, 57% of companies name brand recognition and trust, well ahead of enterprise features, integrations and community size. They turn that trust into revenue through support and services (63%), managed cloud (49%) and open core (43%). Most combine these: 65% run two or more revenue models. Companies stack models as they grow rather than switching between them: managed cloud rises from 35% of companies below $5 million ARR to 66% above $20 million. Venture-backed companies lean toward open core (53% vs. 38% for others).

**Developers adopt, executives buy, and sales becomes the bottleneck.** Open source companies sell to two personas: practitioners use the product and executives buy it. CTOs or VPs of Engineering approve purchases in 46% of cases. That split holds at every revenue stage. Consequently, companies layer go-to-market motions as they grow: 57% of late stage companies run at least two (vs. 40% compared to early stage peers). Three quarters of late-stage companies run enterprise or channel sales. Building mature enterprise sales capability is the most cited scaling challenge and the top priority for the next two years. The payoff is an efficient funnel: among companies that track it, 4 out of 5 recover their customer acquisition cost within 12 months.

Taken together, these results form something the category has lacked: **operational guidance for commercial open source, grounded in what companies actually do rather than what the ecosystem assumes they do.**

# What makes COSS different?

COSS companies operate in a market where the underlying code is freely available, so differentiation has to come from somewhere else. Why do customers choose COSS over alternative solutions? What is a COSS company's value proposition? How does COSS establish a moat? This section looks at where that edge comes from, where it's most contested, and where it starts to strain as companies scale. We begin with the sources of advantage themselves, then turn to the threats, tradeoffs, and scaling pressures that complicate them.

## Competitive advantages

We start by asking COSS companies directly what sets them apart from the competition. As shown in Figure 1, **brand recognition and trust are the top competitive advantages among COSS companies (57%)**, followed by enterprise features (38%) and ecosystem integrations and community size (38% each). In line with the previous iteration of this report, COSS founders directly confirm the notion that community is more important than code: companies that cultivate healthy OSS communities build defensible moats, and consistent delivery across both the commercial product and the open source project earns the long-term credibility that drives customer loyalty.

However, that advantage doesn't go uncontested. **Proprietary or closed source vendors are the primary competitive threat (54%)**, ahead of other COSS companies (37%) and DIY solutions built in-house by customers (32%) (Table A1). This result emphasizes that the **open source project itself is of lesser concern to COSS than proprietary competition.** Like closed source vendors, COSS companies solve pain points for customers but do so in a way that preserves the open source option.

**FIGURE 1**

### Brand recognition and trust are the most important competitive advantages for COSS companies

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q15: "Select the primary competitive advantages of your business? (select all that apply, maximum of three)". Number of respondents = 173. Total responses = 371. Top four most frequent responses displayed.




It helps to understand why customers pick COSS in the first place. Here too, no single factor dominates: Lower TCO (40%), customizability and self-hosting options (38%), and avoidance of vendor lock-in (34%) are cited at similar rates (Table A2). The diversity of responses suggests there's no single silver bullet selling point for COSS products — rather, **the cumulative value proposition of lower cost, lower risk, and greater flexibility together outweighs any one standout feature.**

Those same customer priorities shape what gets commercialized. **Enterprise integrations and SLAs are the most commonly gated commercial features (63% each)**, followed by advanced analytics (49%) and audit/compliance features (48%) (Table A3). These capabilities address enterprise scale needs which users would otherwise

incur non-negligible costs to build themselves. Again, **the strong demand for SLAs in particular suggests COSS companies are successfully bridging the gap between a closed-source vendor and a DIY open source solution.** Turning that differentiation into durable growth, however, is another matter, and it surfaces a distinct set of scaling challenges.

> "No vendor can buy what scikit-learn has: a brand earned one user at a time, taught in every data science curriculum on earth. Now downloaded over 200 million times a month, it has become the trusted foundation of agentic data science and AI, trust we must keep earning, not just holding."
>
> **– GAËL VAROQUAUX** CREATOR OF SCI KIT LEARN AND CSO AT PROBABL

**TABLE 1**

### Building sales capacity is the top scaling challenge and strategic priority for COSS

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q33 ( Number of respondents = 166.=, Total responses = 333). Q35 (Number of respondents = 168, Total responses = 329). Top five most frequent responses displayed.

| Top scaling challenge | Top strategic priority |
|---|---|
| **Building enterprise sales capability 47%** | **Build enterprise sales motion 45%** |
| Converting free users to paid 43% | Expand cloud/SaaS offering 44% |
| Balancing community and commercial interests 38% | Grow community and contributors 36% |
| Hiring talent 25% | Launch new product lines 34% |
| Competing with hyperscalers 23% | Pursue M&A or strategic partnership 22% |

## Challenges

Differentiation only pays off if a company can successfully bring a COSS product to market and scale it. We next explore commonly cited challenges for COSS companies seeking to distinguish themselves from competitors, operationalize the monetization funnel, and grow in scale.

First order challenges for COSS founders are simply barriers to entry. An important subset of our respondent pool are organizations who plan on launching their first COSS product in the next 12 months. Among these companies that have not yet commercialized, **product readiness is the primary barrier**, with 59% still building commercial features and 41% still finding OSS product-market fit (Table A4). Therefore **the primal challenge for COSS startups is simply establishing which features or services customers are willing to pay for.**

**The top scaling challenges are building enterprise sales capacity (47%) and converting free users to paying customers (43%)**, with balancing community and commercial interests close behind at 38% (Table 1). According to the prioritization of these growing pains, closing the gap with larger commercial clients is the most crucial step in the user-to-COSS customer funnel. Those present-day struggles carry straight into companies' plans for the next two years: **looking ahead 24 months, building an enterprise sales motion (45%) and expanding cloud/SaaS offerings (44%) are the top strategic priorities**, followed by community growth (36%).

The convergence of today's top challenge and tomorrow's top priority underscores how central enterprise sales are to COSS at scale. Companies that can harness COSS's innate community growth engine to successfully attract enterprise customers can scale more rapidly.

# Role of community

Community is often treated as the beating heart of an OSS project and is a critical aspect of successful COSS. We next explore the relationship between COSS companies and their OSS project community. How much weight should the community hold in product decisions? What does the typical pipeline between community users and paying customers look like?

However, there are limits to a company's relationship with the community when it comes to influence on product roadmaps: Community input plays a modest role in most COSS roadmaps, as Figure 2 shows. Community input has at least occasional influence for roadmap decisions in 81% of COSS companies. Influence is significant in 44% and "critical" (community drives the roadmap) in 15%. Code contribution patterns reinforce this picture: More than half (53%) of COSS companies report that less than 10% of contributions come from outside the company (Table A5). Company driven development seems to be the norm for COSS. A notable outlier group (roughly 1 in 10) commercializes projects where the community accounts for more than half of all contributions.

Together, these findings demonstrate the breadth and diversity of ways COSS companies can engage with the community. The COSS company's primary objective is to steer the product according to the community's best interest, establishing goodwill and a trustworthy brand along the way.

**If the community's direct role in driving the product itself is modest, its role in the revenue funnel proves harder still to pin down.** In particular, the conversion of community members into paying customers suggests considerable variation in conversion rates across companies but measurement is spotty (Figure 3). Tracking is absent altogether for a quarter of respondents — most often at early-stage firms. Where it exists, 17% attribute over 75%

**FIGURE 2**

## OSS community plays a minor role in COSS product decision making

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q19: How important is community contribution to your product roadmap? (select one). Number of respondents = 177.

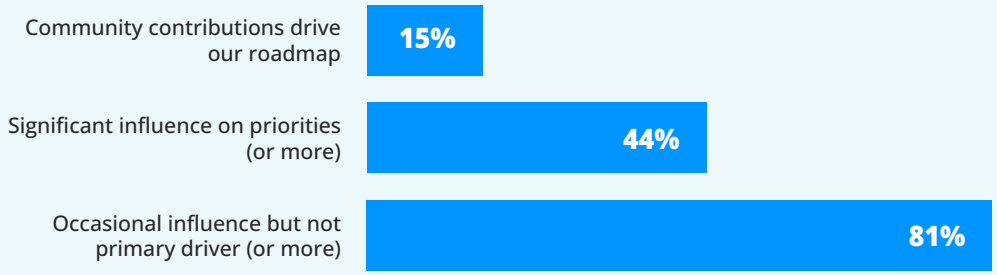
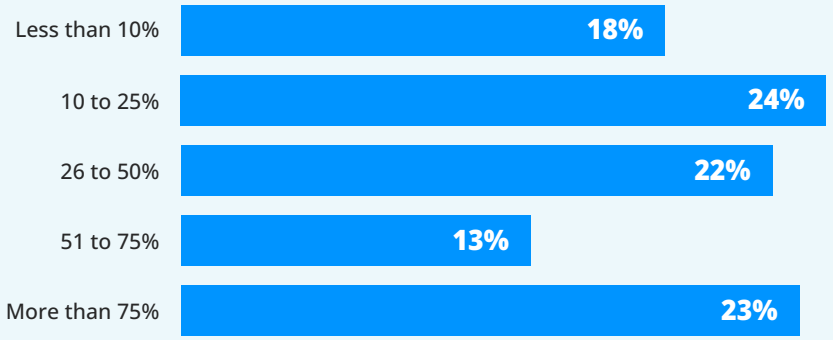



**FIGURE 3**

## COSS customers are diverse and don't always begin as OSS community users

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q32: What percentage of your paying customers started as community users? (select one). Number of respondents = 145. Percentages condition on 75% of respondents who track this information.



of paying customers to the community, a pattern that skews VC-backed and AI/ML. This difference suggests measurement sophistication clusters with investor pressure and sector maturity, rather than being spread evenly across the COSS landscape.

"ClickHouse is built on open source products, including ClickHouse and Langfuse. The benefits are major and diverse: the community contributes ideas, bug reports and PRs, creating a fast feedback loop. On GTM, it drives faster adoption, shorter PoC cycles, and OSS users convert far more easily than greenfield prospects."

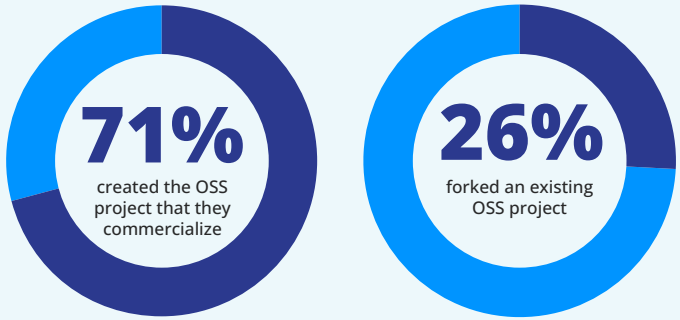
**– ALEXEY MILOVIDOV** CO-FOUNDER AND CTO AT CLICKHOUSE

What's the typical origin story for a COSS project? We find that 72% of COSS companies created the project they commercialize (Figure 4). However, this is not the only successful path to COSS. 26% of founders forked an existing OSS project. There's no single route to commercial success; novelty in the underlying OSS project matters less than whether the COSS company addresses a real business need customers will pay for.

**FIGURE 4**

## COSS products can have different origin stories

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q27. Number of respondents = 170.




"Creating your own project isn't the only path to category leadership. We earned stewardship status on IREE through sustained upstream work and gained a mature codebase, a world-class community, and credibility no greenfield project could match. The commitment is real, but so is the leverage."

**– JAN MORITZ JOSEPH** CEO AT ROOFLINE AI

# COSS strategy

Having established what separates COSS companies from the competition, we next turn to how they operationalize that edge: who they target, what monetization strategies they employ, how they price and license the product, how they reach customers, and how those choices ultimately show up in growth.

## Strategic positioning

COSS companies cast a wide net when choosing customer segments. COSS companies address all market segments, with a skew toward larger companies: mid-market (68%) is the most commonly pursued, ahead of enterprise (63%) and SMB (56%) (Table A7). The relatively even distribution across these different customer channels suggests broad-based demand: **COSS provides valuable solutions to customers of any scale.**

Beyond deciding which organizations to target, COSS companies need to understand who within the potential customer's organization uses the product and who buys it. **Overall, COSS user personas skew practitioners:** software engineers (51%) and DevOps/platform engineers (48%) are the dominant users, with data science/ML (23%) and business/ops (22%) rounding out the top four (Table A8). **Buyer personas, by contrast, sit squarely in technical leadership.** CTO/VP Engineering is the single most common buyer (45%), well ahead of any business or procurement function (Table A9).

"We see open core as selling two different products to two different people, each with a distinct sales cycle. Technical champions need all the technical features to adopt and advocate for the product. Economic buyers need a paid offering that addresses their priorities and bring value to the business that justifies the spend."

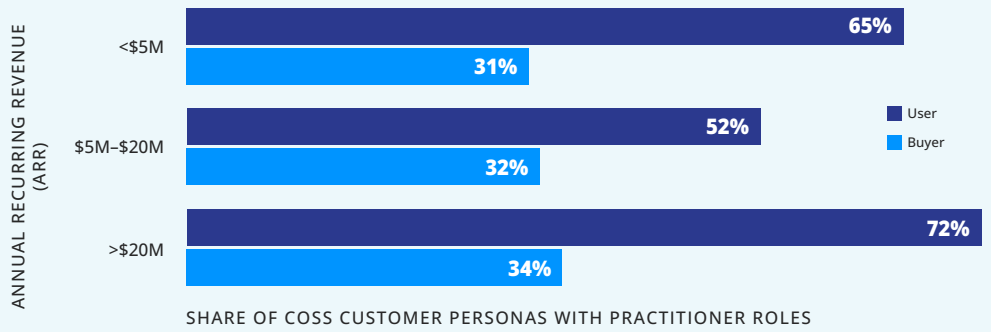
**- DAMIEN GARROS** FOUNDER AT OPSMIL

The open question is whether that split holds as companies scale. **Do COSS companies adjust their marketing strategy to different personas at different growth stages?**[1] Figure 5 shows that the user-buyer persona gap is relatively consistent: **user personas remain 20 to 38 percentage points *more* practitioner-heavy than buyer personas** at every annual recurring revenue (ARR) band, with the largest gaps at the smallest (<$5M ARR) and largest (>$20M ARR)

**FIGURE 5**

### COSS buyer personas remain executive heavy through all growth stages

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q8, Q20, Q21. Number of respondents = 141.




1 We use annual recurring revenue (ARR) as a proxy for COSS growth or maturity. Based on our sample, we segment respondents into ARR bands (millions of USD): Less than $5M (early stage), between $5M and $20M (middle stage), and more than $20M (later stage).

companies and a narrower gap in the thin mid-tier ($5M–$20M, number of respondents = 15). The gap doesn't grow consistently with scale: both user and buyer personas are fairly stable across the COSS growth path, rather than buyer personas migrating toward the executive suite as ARR increases.

The practical implication is that **go-to-market teams will encounter similar buyers through the course of their growth path.** The data shows that roughly 3 out of 10 COSS buyers are practitioners while the remaining 7 hold executive roles. COSS marketing teams don't need to reconfigure their pitch as they scale.

# Monetization

Positioning choices feed directly into the core strategic choice for COSS companies: how companies price and monetize what they build. Two decisions determine how that value gets captured: how customers pay for COSS products (pricing model) and what exactly those products are (revenue model). We explore COSS pricing and revenue model strategy in turn.

## FOUR MAIN COSS BUSINESS MODELS

Asking "what should we charge for?" is really asking two questions that COSS founders routinely conflate. The first is what kind of thing you sell. The second — which only some companies ever face — is *which parts of the software itself you hold back.*

There are four main revenue paths in commercial open source, and they differ in what the customer is actually buying.

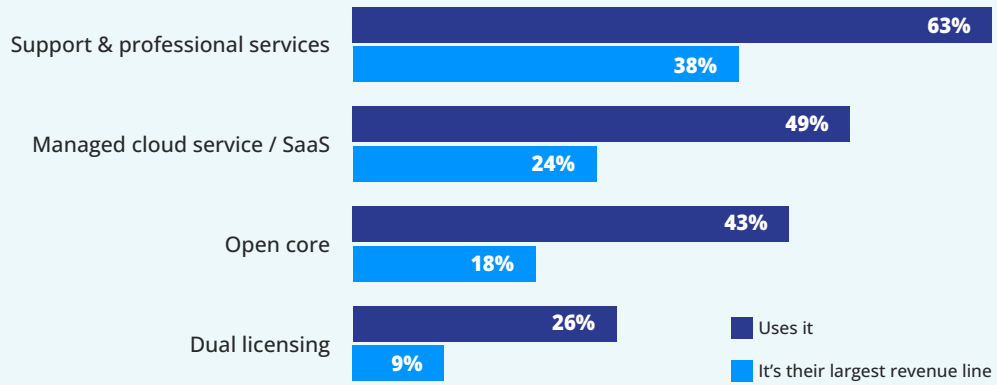
1. **Service & support.** You *charge for expertise around the software.* The code is whole; what the customer buys is people who know it — implementation, tuning, an escalation path at 3am. There is no feature boundary to draw at all.
2. **Cloud/managed service.** You *charge for convenience.* Again the software is whole; the customer is paying not to run it — provisioning, upgrades, scaling, uptime.
3. **Open core.** You *charge for capabilities.* Here, and only here, the company must decide which features ship in the open project and which are reserved for the commercial product.
4. **Dual licensing.** You *charge for permission.* The software and its features are identical on both sides; what the customer buys is the legal right to use it in a way the open licence forbids — typically to embed it in a proprietary product without reciprocal obligations. The boundary is legal, not technical.

Which revenue paths are most widely used in COSS? Which drives the most revenue? In Figure 6, we can see that COSS companies have naturally converged the most lucrative revenue models.

**FIGURE 6**

### Four main COSS business models: support, managed services, open core, and dual licensing

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q12 (Number of respondents = 173, total responses = 382), Q13 (Number of respondents = 116).



**Support and services is the most widely used** path (63% of companies), and by a distance the most likely to be a company's largest revenue line. Cloud and managed services comes in second while open core and dual licensing round out the field.

Notably, Figure 7 also demonstrates that **COSS companies typically do not rely on a single revenue model.** The median COSS company runs two revenue paths. Only 35% run a single one, while 33% run three or more. Among open-core companies specifically, **72% also sell cloud or support** — 58% sell support, 47% sell a managed service. Only 19% run open core as a pure play.

Whether that mix holds steady as companies mature or reshuffles with scale is another question. Does a single revenue model dominate at any stage along the COSS growth path? Figure 7 shows that **support & services is prevalent across all stages of growth, while managed cloud becomes a more important revenue model once companies have achieved sufficient scale.** Open core is an especially useful growth engine for early and middle stage companies (<$20M ARR).

So the four paths are better read as **revenue *layers* a company accumulates than as a strategic identity it adopts.** Scale enables companies to successfully deliver along multiple monetization dimensions.

**FIGURE 7**

## Revenue models stack and adapt along the COSS maturity path

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q8, Q12. Number of respondents = 145. Respondents can select more than one response for Q12.

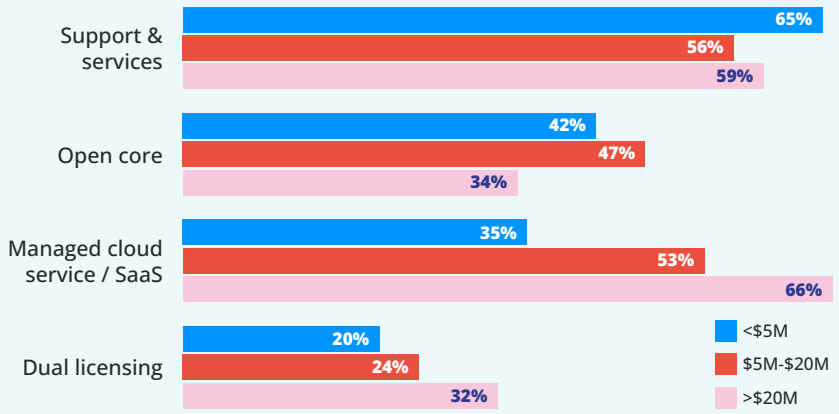



**FIGURE 8**

## Devtools find success with open core

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q7, Q12. Number of respondents = 145. Respondents can select more than one response for Q12.

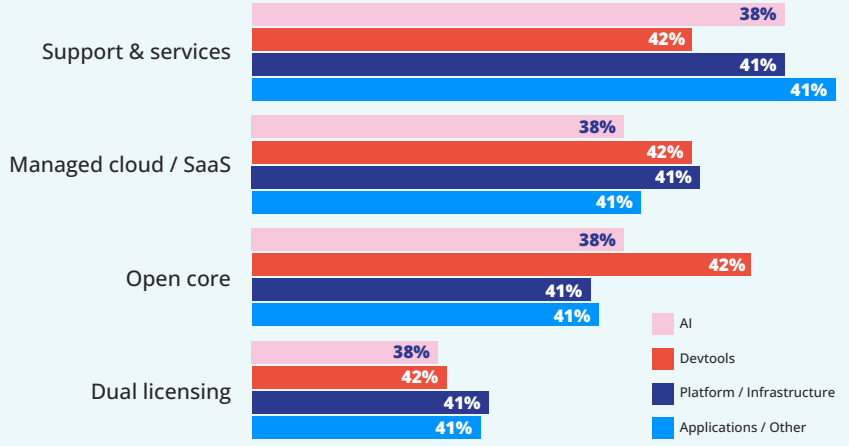


**FIGURE 9**

## Investors favor open core scalability

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q4, Q12. Number of respondents = 145. Respondents can select more than one response for Q12.

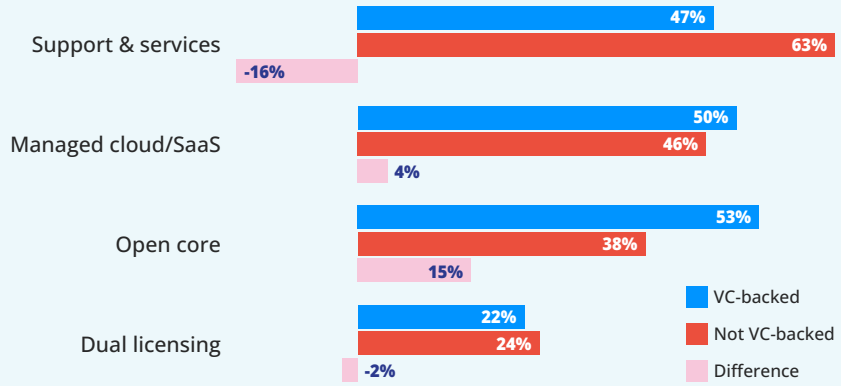
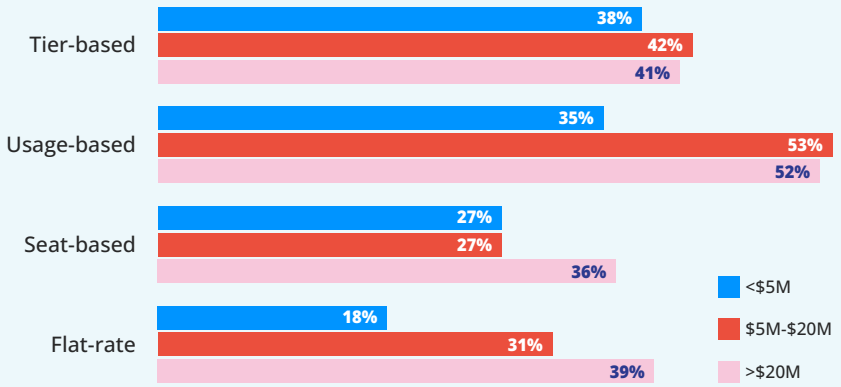



**FIGURE 10**

## COSS companies stack pricing models as they grow

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q8, Q11. Number of respondents = 145. Respondents can select more than one response for Q11.




But these strategic choices vary not only by maturity stage but also on the particular type of COSS company. Our study finds evidence that revenue model choice is a function of product vertical and funding status. In particular, **devtools COSS is more likely to be open core than any other product vertical** (Figure 8). Developers value transparency, hands-on validation, and the flexible option value that comes with an open source tool that exists as a public good. COSS companies capitalize on this trust by offering commercial features and add-ons that developers are willing to pay for.

What about funding status? Do VC-backed COSS companies face different incentives compared with peers without VC funding? Figure 9 shows that **VC-backed COSS companies are more likely to opt for open core business models and less likely to rely on support services.** This speaks to the value that investors place in the **scalability potential of open core**, which typically carries a lower marginal cost per customer than labor-intensive support services.

## PRICING MODELS

Pricing couples with revenue model choice to define monetization. COSS companies can also choose mixed pricing strategies with and adapt with scale. When looking at COSS as a whole, pricing is dominated by usage-based (46%) and tier-based (42%) models; seat-based and flat-rate pricing are less common but still meaningful, each used by 28% of companies (Table A10).

But the pooled view obscures some important heterogeneity. Pricing model choice shifts steadily with scale (Figure 10). Usage-based pricing climbs from 35% of early-stage companies to 52% at late stage, while seat-based (27% → 36%) and flat-rate (18% → 39%) pricing also become markedly more common as companies mature, a sign that **pricing sophistication grows alongside revenue**. In this sense, it is reasonable to speculate that **early stage COSS companies use tier-based pricing to establish a customer base**

and then **transition to usage based pricing to create a durable revenue stream** from power users.

## SPOTLIGHT: OPEN CORE

Services, managed cloud & SaaS, and dual licensing all monetize something other than the composition of the software: expertise, operation, or legal permission. In all three the open project can remain complete, and the commercial offering is built beside it rather than out of it. **Open core is the only path where the product itself is split** and therefore the only one where "what stays free?" is a live question. Founders must decide which capabilities they reserve for their commercial offering. The key is identifying things that customers are willing to pay for.

That reframing matters because the anxiety about betraying the community is, for most COSS companies, attached to a decision they never have to make. **57% percent of the companies in our sample do not use open core at all.**

### Top commercial features for open core COSS

The most commonly reserved by open core companies for their commercial offering are summarized in Figure 11. For the 43% who take the open core path, the study supports a single organizing principle:

> *Leave open everything one team needs to run your software well. Charge for everything a big company needs to run it across many teams, plus the promise that it will keep working.*

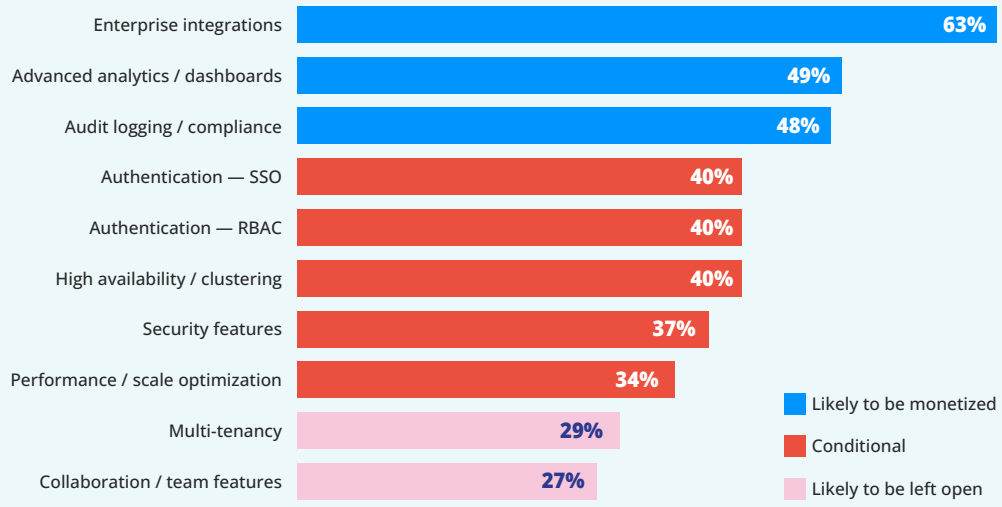
Almost every capability open core COSS companies reserve are things that only **acquire value at organizational scale**. Commercialized open core features are far less likely to be expected by users in either a free or community tier. **Reserving scale dependent features for paying customers costs nothing in adoption**. This clean separation between monetization and adoption attributes is the basis for the open core growth engine.

At the other end, **the least-reserved capabilities are collaboration features**. Companies do not put team features behind the paywall because team features are the mechanism by which a tool spreads from one engineer to a department. Charging for adoption itself is the one clearly dominated strategy in the data.

**FIGURE 11**

### Open core companies reserve features that are easily monetized for their commercial offering

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q14. Number of respondents = 73. Total responses = 350.




Open core companies avoid relying on a single commercialized feature. The median open-core company reserves four of these eleven capabilities, but 20% reserve two or fewer and 28% reserve

seven or more, and no single capability is reserved by even two-thirds of them.

### Conditional commercial features

The decision to reserve some features for a commercial tier often hinges on prior strategic choices rather than arbitrary gating.

- **Identity (SSO) & High Availability (Clustering):** Gated conditional on offering a SaaS / Managed Service. Companies selling a managed service hold back SSO (57% vs 24%) and Clustering (54% vs 26%) far more often than self-hosted sellers. When uptime and operation are the core product, identity forms the natural boundary for the hosted tier.
- **Security Capabilities:** Gated conditional on target buyer size (Enterprise vs. SMB). Enterprise-focused vendors gate security features at nearly triple the rate of SMB-focused vendors (41% vs 15%). They don't charge to make the free version safe; they charge for fleet-wide administration (e.g., automated key rotation, multi-node scanning) required at scale.
- **Performance:** Gated conditional on core technical differentiation. 55% of companies whose users choose them for performance reserve these optimizations for the commercial offerings, compared to 27% for others. Counter to common advice, founders give away entry-level versions of their core strength for adoption, then reserve industrial-strength performance for paying customers.
- **Permissions (RBAC):** Gated by founder judgment (no strong condition). With no clear delivery, buyer, or product pattern dictating RBAC monetization, usage splits down the middle (~40% gating rate). It remains a discretionary call.

# Licensing

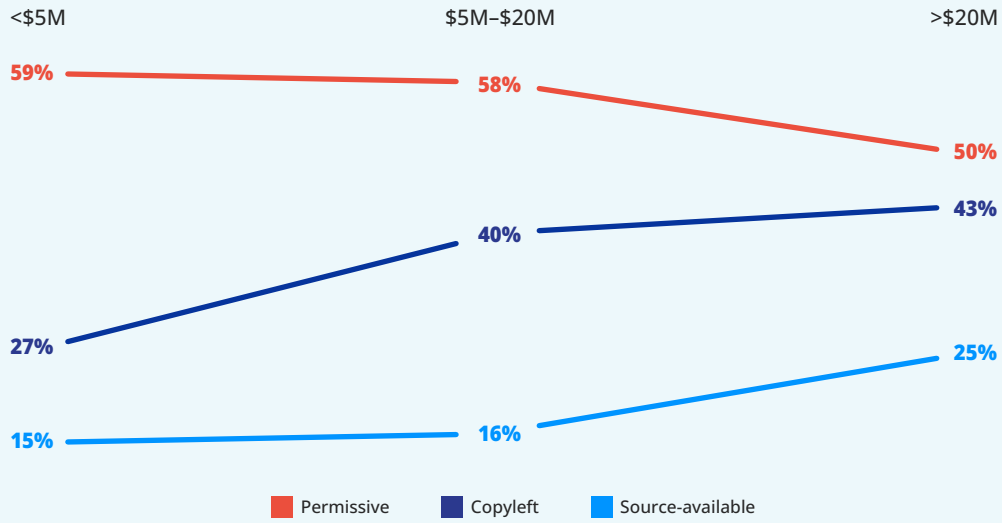
Pricing and revenue models aren't the only commercial levers at play. The particular licensing strategy chosen by COSS companies defines their identity and determines competitive differentiation, customer adoption, defensibility, and monetization.

Across all COSS companies, **permissive licensing (MIT, Apache 2.0, BSD) is the clear default**, used by 64% of companies. Strong copyleft (GPL/AGPL, 30%) and source-available terms (BSL/SSPL/Elastic, 20%) are significant but secondary strategies (Table A13).

**FIGURE 12**

## A concerning trend towards non-permissive COSS licensing at scale

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q8, Q18. Number of respondents = 145. Respondents can select more than one response for Q18.



That default erodes somewhat with scale to reveal a concerning strategic trend. Figure 12 shows copyleft adoption (strong and weak combined) rising from 27% of early-stage companies to 43% at late stage, even as permissive licensing remains the plurality choice at every maturity band. Consistent with high profile anecdotal evidence, **this finding confirms that larger, later-stage COSS companies increasingly reach for stricter licensing terms for commercial protection**.

While shifting toward stricter source available or copyleft terms may appear to be a rational defense against cloud providers or non-contributing users at scale, it is a short-sighted strategy that undermines the foundational premise of commercial open source. COSS companies do not scale on superior code alone; they scale on open source trust, developer goodwill, and community-driven distribution. Retracting permissive rights mid-flight converts early champions into cynics, burning the ecosystem trust that enabled the initial growth trajectory. Tarnished credibility and community trust could make it hard for a company to launch new COSS products in the future.

## Go-to-market motions

Go-to-market (GTM) motions are the most important strategic link between the COSS product and an effective customer pipeline. A defining feature of COSS is an open access solution that users can use for themselves with no strings attached. Product-led growth (PLG) is a natural candidate for COSS but our study finds that enterprise sales are a critical complement to maximizing growth potential and scaling efficiency.

Founders are confronted with a set of related challenges when deciding on a go-to-market strategy. Which GTM motions are best suited for COSS growth? How should GTM motions be combined or stacked? How should these strategies change or adapt with scale?

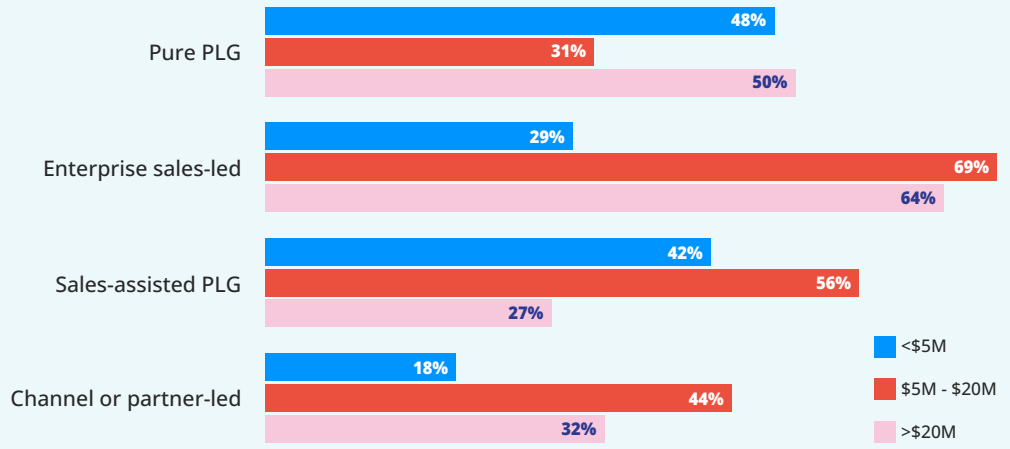
In Figure 13, we segment the COSS sample by maturity stage and plot GTM strategy choice. We see clear evidence of GTM motion stacking: **57% of COSS companies with >$20M ARR run at least 2 GTM motions compared with 40% for <$5M ARR**. Mid-stage companies ($5M–$20M ARR) run the most diverse GTM mix (2.0 motions on average, versus 1.5 early and 1.8 late). PLG stays relatively constant between early and late stage COSS at around 50% of companies. The real transition comes as **companies transition from sales assisted PLG (-15pp) for enterprise (+35pp) and channel or partner led sales (+14pp) capacity between early and later stages**. COSS companies upgrade to more robust GTM combinations that take advantage of scale.

The GTM upgrade path becomes even more clear when looking at the specific motion combinations at different COSS scales (Figure 14). Pure PLG is self-serve dominant and combines no other

**FIGURE 13**

### GTM combinations beat single motions in COSS

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q8, Q23. Number of respondents = 145. Respondents can select more than one response for Q23.



motions. COSS companies can next upgrade PLG with some sales assistance. Finally, the most complex motions combine enterprise sales or distribution partners with PLG. **COSS companies drop single motions pure (-17pp) or sales-assisted PLG (-22pp) as they grow. 74% of late stage COSS companies upgrade to enterprise or channel/partner led sales from basic sales-assistance.** Notably, PLG is a constant feature of COSS at all stages. What changes is the sales capacity to complement it.

The takeaway is that COSS companies should plan for an expanding GTM footprint rather than a hard pivot away from PLG. Channel and enterprise sales motions layer on top of and supercharge the bottom-up, product centered motion that got them there.

## Product discovery channels

Another strategic choice involves the product discovery channels where companies choose to invest marketing resources. Like other strategic choices, **discovery channels evolve with scale**. In Figure 15, the percentage point difference in importance frequency for different product discovery channels between mature COSS companies (>$20M ARR) and early-stage companies (<$5M ARR), captures an important shift in marketing strategy along the COSS growth path. **Conferences and DevRel partnerships become more important discovery channels for mature COSS companies** (+17 percentage points). On the other hand, GitHub discovery and social media become less important (-11 percentage points) as COSS companies grow. The sharpest change is the relevance of organic search & SEO for later stage COSS (-24 percentage points). As COSS companies mature, **discovery shifts from self-serve toward higher-touch and relationship-driven channels**.

This shift from self-serve platforms to high-touch forums underscores why brand and customer trust becomes the single greatest advantage for scaling COSS. In the early stages, developers discover products

**FIGURE 14**

### GTM strategies are upgraded and fortified as COSS companies grow

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q8, Q23.
Number of respondents = 145. Respondents can select more than one response for Q23.

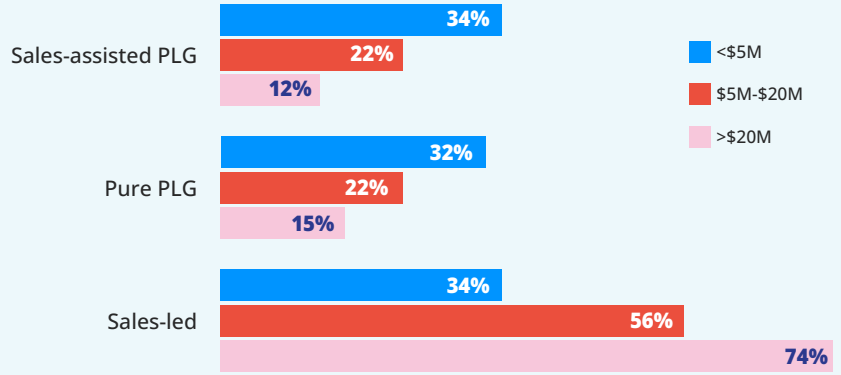
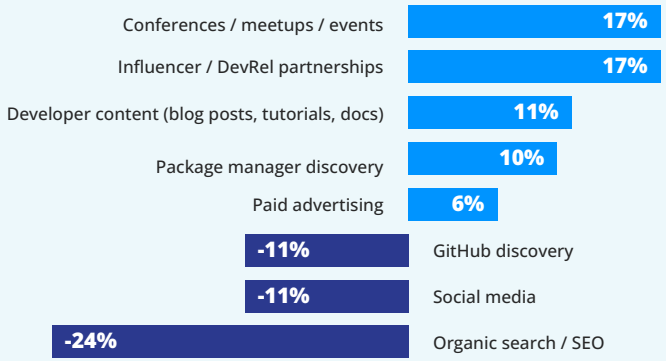



**FIGURE 15**

### Discovery channels shift from initial visibility to COSS ecosystem influence in later stages

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q8, Q29. Number of respondents = 145.



directly through channels where technical utility and direct code access encourage a low investment trial (organic search, GitHub, and social media). However, as COSS companies grow, they rely more heavily on relationship-driven discovery channels. Buying decisions move beyond individual developers to enterprise decision makers. In these high-touch environments, **an established company brand serves as essential reputation capital**: It validates the software's enterprise readiness, mitigates adoption risk, and converts the organic community goodwill built in the early stages into the institutional trust required for large-scale enterprise deals.

## Strategy archetypes

Having examined strategic elements individually, it's worth stepping back to see how these choices cluster together in practice. In this section, we look at COSS strategy archetypes: common patterns that create a "fingerprint" of strategic choice unique to a particular COSS segment. To account for the incredible diversity

**TABLE 2**

### Strategy archetypes at different COSS scales

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q8 x (Q11, Q12, Q14, Q18, Q22, Q23, Q29, Q35).
Number of respondents = 155.

| Strategy | Early | Mid | Late |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Pricing model** | Tier-based | Usage-based | Usage-based |
| **Revenue model** | Support & professional services | Support & professional services | Managed cloud service / SaaS |
| **Commercial features** | Support level agreements (SLAs) | Enterprise integrations | Advanced analytics / dashboards |
| **Licensing strategy** | Permissive (MIT, Apache 2.0, BSD) | Permissive (MIT, Apache 2.0, BSD) | Permissive (MIT, Apache 2.0, BSD) |
| **Customer segment targets** | SMB (less than 500 employees) | Mid-market (500 to 5,000 employees) | Enterprise (more than 5,000 employees) |
| **GTM strategy** | Product-led growth (PLG) | Sales-assisted PLG | Enterprise sales-led |
| **Product discovery channels** | Developer content (blog posts, tutorials, docs) | Organic search / SEO | Conferences / meetups / events |
| **Top strategic priorities** | Build enterprise sales motion | Build enterprise sales motion | Expand cloud/SaaS offering |

in COSS, we look at these archetypes after segmenting companies by stage of growth and funding status.

Table 2 documents the top strategic archetypes by ARR maturity. Proven COSS maturation arcs become even more clear through this lens: **PLG targeting SMBs at early stage, sales-assisted PLG targeting mid-market at mid-stage, and enterprise sales-led motions targeting large enterprises at late stage**. As COSS companies scale by ARR, their commercial strategy predictably shifts from grassroots community monetization to sophisticated enterprise infrastructure and managed cloud solutions. While permissive licensing remains the universal foundation across all growth stages, early-stage startups focus on organic developer reach, tier-based pricing, and monetizing support for SMB clients as they build their initial enterprise sales motion. As companies enter the mid-stage, they transition toward usage-based pricing, leverage SEO for discovery, and gate enterprise integrations behind sales-assisted PLG to secure mid-market accounts. Upon reaching late-stage status, companies mature into true platform providers: they pivot revenue models toward fully managed SaaS offerings, monetize high-value capabilities like advanced analytics, drive discovery via high-touch industry events, and deploy full enterprise sales forces to capture large accounts and scale their cloud footprints.

Table 3 summarizes the modal (most common) answer for COSS companies by their funding status. VC-backed and self-funded companies align on foundation-level choices, both favoring usage-based pricing and permissive licensing. Their GTM strategies, however, reflect fundamentally different scaling priorities. Driven by expectations of rapid hyper-growth, **VC-backed startups favor an open-core revenue model, keep enterprise integrations proprietary**, and **utilize sales-assisted PLG to aggressively target mid-market accounts** with the ultimate priority of launching new product lines. In contrast, bootstrapped or organic non-VC companies pursue a leaner operational playbook centered on profitability: they monetize through support and professional services, guard value with SLAs, rely heavily on community events for discovery, and focus their sales motions on closing large enterprise clients to build sustainable enterprise sales capabilities.

## Conversion efficiency

The study reveals that COSS is incredibly efficient at acquiring paid customers. Among COSS companies that track these metrics, **nearly four out of five recover customer acquisition costs and convert OSS users to paying customers in under 12 months** (Figure 16). It's worth noting that even though these numbers are stellar, a large share of companies don't track them at all, so getting a precise read across the full sample is harder.

**TABLE 3**

### Strategy archetypes by primary COSS product category

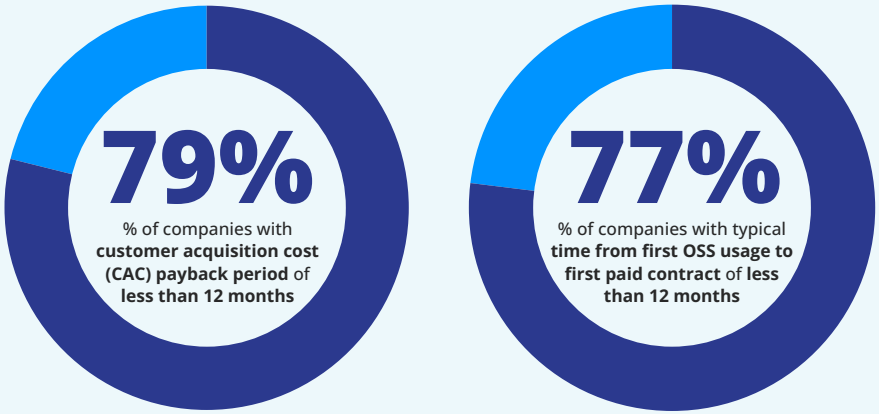
Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q4 x (Q11, Q12, Q14, Q18, Q22, Q23, Q29, Q35). Number of respondents = 182.

| Strategy | VC-backed | Not VC-backed |
|---|---|---|
| **Pricing model** | Usage-based | Usage-based |
| **Revenue model** | Open core | Support & professional services |
| **Product parts kept open** | Enterprise integrations | Support level agreements (SLAs) |
| **Licensing strategy** | Permissive (MIT, Apache 2.0, BSD) | Permissive (MIT, Apache 2.0, BSD) |
| **Customer segment targets** | Mid-market (500 to 5,000 employees) | Enterprise (more than 5,000 employees) |
| **GTM strategy** | Sales-assisted PLG | Product-led growth (PLG) |
| **Product discovery channels** | Developer content (blog posts, tutorials, docs) | Conferences / meetups / events |
| **Top strategic priorities** | Launch new product lines | Build enterprise sales motion |

**FIGURE 16**

## 4 out of 5 COSS companies recover customer acquisition costs (CAC) and convert OSS users to customers in under 12 months

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q25 (Number of respondents = 123), Q31 (Number of respondents = 137). Percentages calculated conditional on respondents who do track this information.




Free-to-paid conversion is the least consistently measured: 38% of companies don't track it at all, and among those that do, rates are spread evenly across bands with no dominant tier, with a median of 2–5% of OSS users converting to customers (Table A16). CAC payback is better tracked and faster: a quarter of companies (25%) don't track the metric at all, but among those that do, 79% recover acquisition costs within 12 months (Table A17). Time from first OSS usage to first paid contract tells a similar story: 42% don't track it, but among those that do, 77% close within 12 months while only 23% take longer than a year (Table A18).

"When you're the 9th most-downloaded model in history, most prospects evaluating your commercial offering have already used your open-source model on their own data, in their own environment. The technical conviction is already there. Open source dramatically compresses the sales cycle, turning months of technical validation into short conversations about needs and scale."

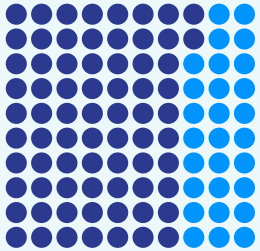
**– VINCENT MOLINA** CEO AT PYANNOTE AI

# COSS & AI

As with many other sectors, AI is a force that has the potential to reshape every stage and strategic choice for COSS all at once. We next pay particular attention to the nature of this change. Is AI changing the COSS value proposition, opening up new products and revenue streams, or simply adding new costs and competitive pressure?

**FIGURE 17**
COSS flourishes in AI tailwinds

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q37. Number of respondents = 173.



**72%**
of COSS companies consider AI is a net positive for business

## Overall impact of AI on COSS

Overall, **we find that the net impact of AI on COSS is overwhelmingly positive: ~72% of respondents report a net positive impact on their business over the past 12 months** 36% strong, 36% moderate), while **only 8% report any net negative impact at all** (Figure 17, more detail in Table A19). That optimism holds across every product category, though its intensity varies: unsurprisingly AI-vertical companies are the most bullish (88% positive), while Platform and Infrastructure is comparatively more cautious but still solidly positive at 72% (Table A21).

Among the small group (7%) of COSS companies less than optimistic about AI, the concerns are competitive rather than existential: Harder competition for attention and funding and rising customer expectations or reduced demand top the list (Table A20). Taken together, the net sentiment on AI suggests founders are not only ready to face the challenge of scaling COSS in the AI era, they seem to be riding the wave themselves.

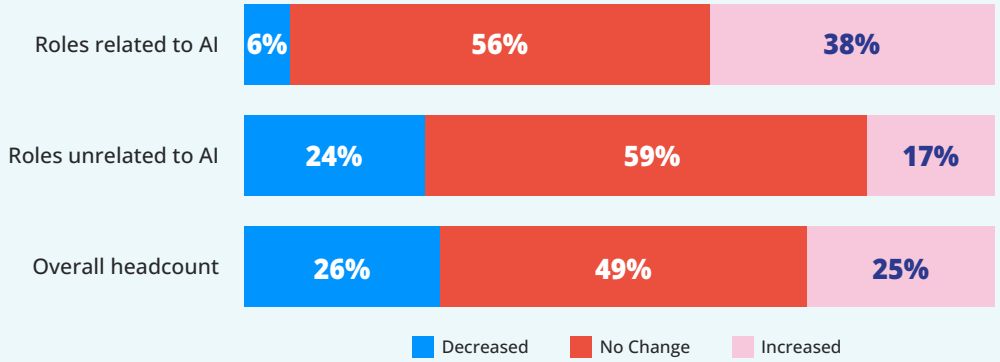
A similar pattern shows up by ARR maturity: **Late-stage companies (>$20M ARR) are the most AI-positive at 81%, while mid-stage firms are the least (63%) (Table A22)**. One reading is that AI tailwinds take scale to fully materialize, with the resources and distribution to capitalize on them; another is that mid-stage firms are simply the ones still working out where AI nets out for their business, caught between early experimentation and late-stage payoff. At an even more basic level, AI creates a similar level of uncertainty for labor market strategy for COSS companies as it does for the rest of the market. Founders must make strategic personnel decisions to capitalize on and adapt to AI's transformative force on operations.

In Figure 18, we summarize hiring trends for COSS companies, in roles either related or unrelated to AI and for overall headcount. AI-related roles are the only headcount category with clear net growth (38% increased vs. 6% decreased), while non-AI roles and overall headcount are flat to net-negative (24% and 26% report decreases, respectively). This pattern is consistent with **AI prompting talent reallocation toward AI-specific roles rather than expanding total headcount**. COSS companies are cautiously retooling their internal talent to leverage AI efficiently.

**FIGURE 18**

## COSS companies are reallocating talent towards AI roles rather than changing overall headcount

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q43. Number of respondents = 150.




"Great researchers want hard problems, strong peers and the freedom to share their work. Open source lets them judge the ambition and quality of a team's research, and get a sense of what working there would be like."

**– NOAH HOLLMANN** CO-FOUNDER AT PRIOR LABS

# From the experts

Red Hat

The future of open source AI depends on building and fostering open source communities. From this research, we know that the majority of COSS companies view AI and community contribution as net positives and vital to their product roadmaps. This reinforces the core values of open source — sustainable innovation and healthy, collaborative communities. As AI continues to shape software development and contribution, more organizations than ever have the opportunity to adopt open source practices, lowering barriers to entry and increasing pathways to participation. There's no question that building AI in the open makes technology more resilient, transparent and beneficial to us all.

**– KIMBERLY CRAVEN** SENIOR DIRECTOR, OPEN SOURCE AI PROGRAM OFFICE, ***RED HAT***

## Sources of AI value for COSS

Having established that AI's impact skews strongly positive, the next question is where that value is being realized within COSS. Does AI increase demand for the COSS product, improve internal productivity, or introduce new methods for commercialization?

Like most of the market, **the most cited benefit of AI for COSS is internal improvement in productivity:** 73% of AI-positive respondents cite improved productivity or development velocity, well ahead of any revenue-side gain (Figure 19, more detail in Table A23). New use cases and expanded addressable market (46%) and AI features becoming a monetization lever (39%) round out the top drivers, but each is cited by fewer than half of respondents. So far, AI's clearest COSS dividend is efficiency, not yet new revenue.

Strikingly, this pattern holds across every product category: productivity leads in every industry segment, and the rank order of secondary benefits barely changes from dev tools to platform or infrastructure to AI-vertical companies (Table A24). The broad consistency reinforces the theme of AI as a rising tide and the AI effect on COSS companies, at least at this stage, is more about shared productivity gains than industry-specific advantage.

**FIGURE 19**

### AI improves productivity, expands markets, and creates new sources of monetization for COSS

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q39. Number of respondents = 155. Respondents can select more than one response for Q39.




## AI and COSS strategy

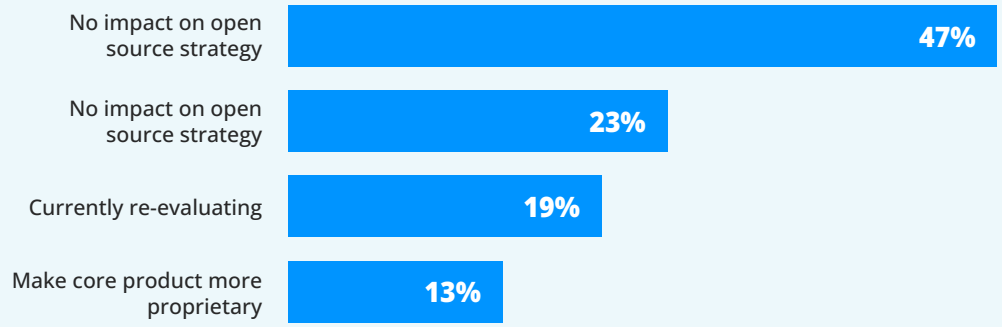
Is the expansion of AI changing the way COSS operates? If so, how? Are there particular COSS product verticals confronted with greater adaptation obstacles or more lucrative business potential? We next explore the relationship between COSS strategy and AI trends.

**Despite AI's disruptive potential, COSS open source strategy has proven largely resilient to it**: 43% of respondents report no change at all (Figure 20). Among the companies that do adapt, though, the direction is telling: COSS companies are nearly twice as likely

**FIGURE 20**

### COSS strategy is robust to AI. When adaptation is needed, increased openness dominates.

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q42. Number of respondents = 166.



to open up more of their core product to attract AI developers and grow their community (23%) as they are to lock features behind commercial tiers to protect their moat (13%). If AI is forcing a strategic reckoning, it is nudging COSS toward openness, not away from it.

That reckoning remains partial. Only 17% describe AI as foundational to their business model, while a majority (55%) report at least incremental change: new pricing levers or added features layered on an otherwise intact core model (Table A25). The remaining 26% report no meaningful impact.

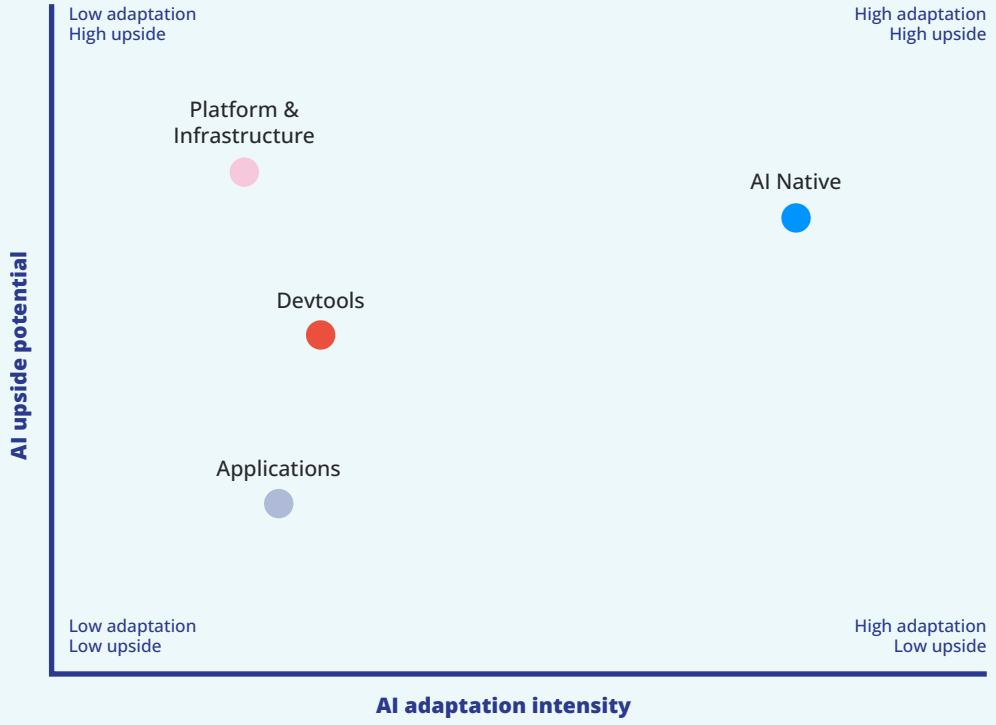
That partial reckoning isn't spread evenly across product categories, either. Figure 21 maps each segment along two dimensions: AI upside potential and adaptation intensity.[2] **Platform and infrastructure COSS enjoy relatively high upside with comparatively little required adaptation**, while AI-vertical companies naturally sit at the opposite extreme, showing the highest adaptation intensity of any segment. Compared with other verticals like applications or devtools, infrastructure COSS sees more upside in AI as it creates new monetization levers, expands total addressable market, and attracts additional interest from investors.

We show the reported reasons why customers choose COSS separately for AI/ML and other COSS companies in Figure 22. The clearest differentiator is how AI/ML customers arrive at COSS, not why they trust it: **customizability and the ability to self-host or modify the software is the single most-cited reason for AI/ML customers** (51%, their #1 reason) but is not the top factor for non-AI/ML peers (34%). AI/ML customers also cite bottom-up, engineer-led adoption far more often (38% vs. 25%), where it's the

**FIGURE 21**

## Platform and infrastructure COSS enjoys high AI upside at low adaptation cost

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q7, Q38, Q40, Q42. Number of respondents = 175. "AI upside potential" (Q38) and "AI adaptation intensity" (Q40, Q42) are numerical indices derived from survey responses.




2 We construct measures of AI upside potential and AI adaptation intensity using weighted combinations of respondent answers. We then take the average of these scores by product vertical. AI upside score: weighted sum of Q38 benefit themes (monetization = 2.5, demand expansion = 2.0, capital = 1.5, operational / ecosystem = 1.0), normalized by the maximum possible score. Adaptation intensity score: mean of Q40 (business model change) and Q42 (open source strategy change), each recoded on a 0–1 scale ("no change" = 0, "incremental change or in transition" = 0.5, "transformational or change to openness" = 1.0). The "AI is foundational" Q40 response is excluded from adaptation scoring

second most cited reason but dead last for non-AI/ML customers. Non-AI/ML customers, meanwhile, lean more on superior technical performance (38% vs. 18%) and data sovereignty / regulatory compliance (36% vs. 26%) — both cited notably less often by AI/ML customers. Lower total cost of ownership and avoidance of vendor lock-in are cited at nearly identical rates across both segments (38–40% and 33–34%, respectively).

Taken together, AI/ML COSS's edge doesn't come from data sovereignty or perceived technical superiority, as the original hypothesis assumed — it comes from hands-on control (customizability/self-hosting) and organic, engineer-driven adoption, while non-AI/ML customers' choices skew more toward cost, compliance, and performance considerations.

A related question is whether that same AI/ML distinction shows up in how companies monetize, rather than just in why customers buy. **Are AI COSS companies adopting distinct monetization models compared to non-AI COSS peers?** We find that the revenue model mix is broadly similar across both segments (Figure 23): Although AI/ML companies lean somewhat more on training and certification (16% vs. 9%) and non-AI/ML companies lean slightly more on dual licensing (12% vs. 9%), neither difference is large enough to support a distinct AI revenue playbook. The similarities between AI and other verticals reinforces the notion that **the defining features of COSS are not driven by particular product niches.**

**FIGURE 22**

## Customization and ability to self-host are the top reasons customers choose AI COSS

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q7, Q17.
Number of respondents = 171. Respondents can select more than one response for Q17.

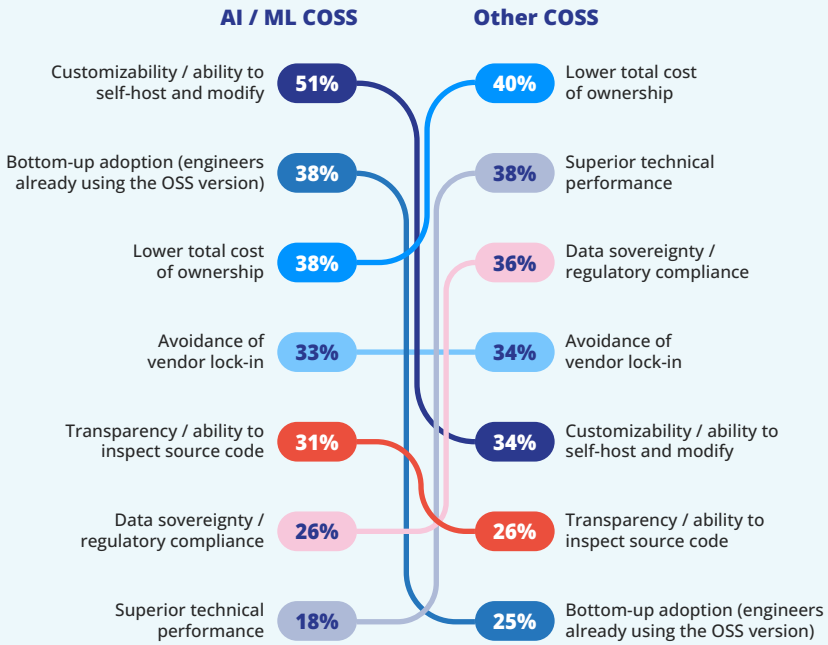
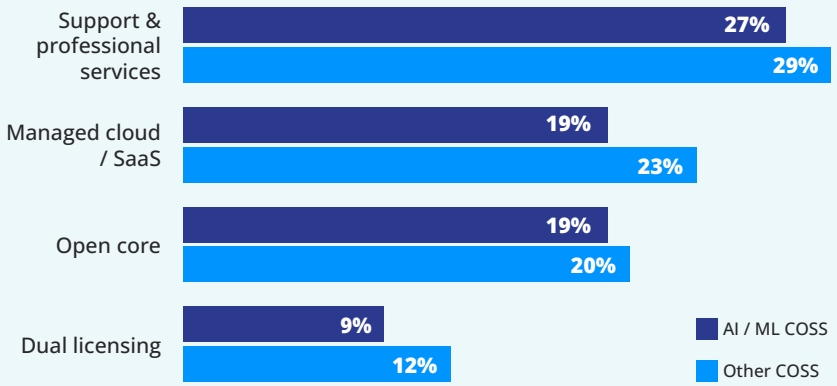



**FIGURE 23**

## AI companies follow the same COSS monetization strategies

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q7, Q12.
Number of respondents = 173. Respondents can select more than one response for Q12.



# AI COSS strategy archetypes

AI COSS is not a monolith. Whether a company considers AI their primary product category obscures the variety of ways that COSS companies monetize AI demand as part of their overall strategy. This module of the survey sorts those AI-forward companies into four self-described archetypes: AI-native products, data/tooling pipelines, infrastructure for AI/ML, and AI bolted on as a feature of an existing product. Even within this AI-first cohort, a shared toolkit coexists with genuinely different playbooks.

Across these archetypes, usage-based pricing and permissive licensing are near-universal defaults (Table 4). The real differentiation shows up in go-to-market emphasis: AI-native companies prioritize building an enterprise sales motion and lean on GitHub for discovery; data/tooling providers focus on growing community and contributors; infrastructure players aim to expand their cloud/SaaS offering. The outlier is the small (number of respondents = 9) "AI as feature" group, which targets enterprise customers directly and favors a managed cloud revenue model over support services.

Looking at prevalence rather than strategy, data/tooling pipelines and AI-native products are the most common self-described positions among AI-relevant companies (54% each), with infrastructure for AI/ML close behind at 51% (Table A26). Very few companies describe AI as merely a feature bolted onto an existing product, consistent with "AI as Feature" being the smallest and most idiosyncratic archetype in the strategy comparison above.

**TABLE 4**

## AI COSS strategy archetypes

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q36 x (Q11, Q12, Q14, Q18, Q22, Q23, Q29, Q35). Number of respondents = 41.

| Strategy | AI-native | Data / Tooling | Infrastructure | AI as Feature |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pricing model** | Usage-based | Usage-based | Usage-based | Usage-based |
| **Revenue model** | Support & professional services | Support & professional services | Support & professional services | Managed cloud service / SaaS |
| **Commercial features** | Enterprise integrations | Advanced analytics / dashboards | Enterprise integrations | Support level agreements (SLAs) |
| **Licensing strategy** | Permissive (MIT, Apache 2.0, BSD) | Permissive (MIT, Apache 2.0, BSD) | Permissive (MIT, Apache 2.0, BSD) | Permissive (MIT, Apache 2.0, BSD) |
| **Customer segment targets** | Mid-market (500 to 5,000 employees) | Mid-market (500 to 5,000 employees) | Mid-market (500 to 5,000 employees) | Enterprise (more than 5,000 employees) |
| **GTM strategy** | Product-led growth (PLG) — self-serve dominant | Product-led growth (PLG) — self-serve dominant | Product-led growth (PLG) — self-serve dominant | Product-led growth (PLG) — self-serve dominant |
| **Product discovery channels** | GitHub discovery (trending, explore, search) | Developer content (blog posts, tutorials, docs) | Developer content (blog posts, tutorials, docs) | Conferences / meetups / events |
| **Top strategic priorities** | Build enterprise sales motion | Grow community and contributors | Expand cloud/SaaS offering | Expand cloud/SaaS offering |

And when it comes to sourcing the models themselves, most companies aren't training their own: 53% integrate proprietary third-party APIs (OpenAI, Anthropic, and similar), while open-source fine-tuning is a distant but meaningful second at 32% (Table A27). That reliance on outside providers reinforces a broader theme running through this section: for now, COSS companies are adapting to AI mostly by integrating and repackaging existing capabilities rather than building novel AI infrastructure of their own.

## From the experts

CLOUD NATIVE COMPUTING FOUNDATION

Over the last decade of helping bootstrap the CNCF at the Linux Foundation, I've seen open source software evolve from a disruptive idea into the default foundation of the modern infrastructure that not only powers the internet but also AI these days. As the State of Commercial Open Source 2026 report reveals, AI isn't a threat to commercial open-source software (COSS) — it's an accelerating tailwind. With 72% of companies viewing AI as a net positive, its primary impact is driving internal productivity rather than forcing an immediate pivot in revenue models. Crucially, AI is pushing the ecosystem toward greater collaboration, as companies are nearly twice as likely to make their core products more open to attract developers and also seek open models to improve cost efficiencies.

Despite these rapid technological shifts, the fundamental differentiator in COSS remains unchanged: 57% of founders cite brand recognition and community trust as their ultimate competitive moat. However, turning that trust into a sustainable business requires strategic evolution as you scale. I encourage founders, investors and maintainers to use these insights to build more resilient projects and businesses that foster the healthy, thriving ecosystems that will define the next decade of open source.

**– CHRIS ANISZCZYK** CTO, CLOUD & INFRASTRUCTURE,
*THE LINUX FOUNDATION*

# Conclusion

This report set out to move beyond whether commercial open source works to the harder question of how. By surveying 225 founders and enterprise leaders directly, we've traced the specific strategic decisions behind COSS growth: pricing and revenue models, licensing posture, go-to-market motion, and, increasingly, how AI is reshaping all of it. That level of operational detail hasn't existed before at this scale, and it matters because COSS is clearly no longer a niche strategy. It's a proven growth model that requires a data-driven playbook for founders, investors, and the broader community.

Rather than identifying a single winning formula, a major theme of this analysis is that COSS strategies converge with maturity. Companies don't succeed by picking one revenue model, one licensing regime, or one go-to-market motion and holding it fixed. They succeed by adding capabilities in a fairly consistent sequence as they mature: broadening from experimentation to support services and managed SaaS, layering sales assistance onto PLG rather than replacing it, and adjusting to more relevant product discovery channels as COSS scales. Enterprise sales capability stands out as the connective thread through nearly every section of this report. It's the top cited scaling challenge, the top priority over the next 24 months, and consistently implemented by COSS companies that scale successfully. And AI, so far, reinforces this playbook rather than upending it: a clear productivity tailwind for nearly three-quarters of companies, but not yet a force that has rewritten why customers buy or how companies monetize, except for the small, self-selected slice of AI-native companies willing to adapt their business model more fundamentally.

## Key takeaways

- For **founders**, the actionable takeaway is to treat strategy as sequential rather than fixed: resist over-committing to a single revenue or licensing model early, invest in enterprise sales capacity before it becomes an emergency, and recognize that stacking go-to-market motions is what separates faster-growing companies from the rest.
- For the **community**, the finding that community input plays a secondary role in most product roadmaps, paired with the low share of contributions coming from outside the company, is worth sitting with; the maintainers and contributors around a project remain a distinct constituency from paying customers, and companies that want to sustain healthy communities will need to invest in that relationship deliberately rather than assume it scales on its own.
- For **foundations** and **other ecosystem stewards**, the priority is closing measurement gaps: a striking share of companies don't track free-to-paid conversion, community-to-customer conversion, or CAC payback at all, which means the ecosystem is making strategic decisions with incomplete data. Standardizing and promoting these metrics, as well as the tooling to track them, would raise the floor for the entire category, not just the largest or most sophisticated players.

Taken as a whole, this study reinforces that commercial open source has matured from a promising thesis into a repeatable, if not yet fully codified, discipline. The companies that will win the next phase of COSS are unlikely to be the ones with the single cleverest strategic move, but the ones that build the operational muscle in enterprise sales, measurement, community stewardship, and AI adaptation to execute on several fronts at once. We hope this report gives founders, investors, and the broader COSS community a clearer, evidence-based map of that terrain, and we look forward to tracking how it evolves in future iterations of this research.

## PRIORITY RESEARCH DIRECTIONS FOR AI AND COSS

This study's exploration of the dynamics between AI and COSS should be continued in future strands of research. We suggest several promising and critical areas for future work:

- **Integration vs. disruption in established COSS:** The focus of the current study are startups but established companies are also monetizing AI in creative ways. Future research should investigate how mature platforms embed AI capabilities — such as AI agents and coding assistants — to expand enterprise subscription models without undermining their core open source ecosystems.
- **Impact of open weight models and hybrid licensing:** The evidence for diversification within AI COSS was limited in this study by sample size. Additional work is needed to better understand the richer commercial dynamics of open weight LLMs, layers of the OSS AI stack suitable for monetization, and what .
- **The changing role of community as a strategic asset:** While there is no current evidence to suggest that AI dramatically changes the cornerstone role that community plays for COSS, it's worth exploring how durable this pattern is over time as AI continues to evolve.

# Methodology

| | |
|---|---|
| **Data collection method** | Web survey |
| **Survey length** | 43 questions |
| **Survey target population** | Company founders and decision makers who currently commercialize an open source software product or plan to within the next 12 months |
| **Survey distribution** | Linux Foundation newsletter subscribers, Linux Foundation social media channels, research partner email/social channels (Serena, CNCF, Y Combinator, Mistral, Kaiyuanshe, GOSIM, OSFA, Scarf, Futurewei, Probabl, COSSA, AWS, Red Hat) |
| **Survey instrument development period** | January–March 2026 |
| **Survey fielding period** | March–June 2026 |
| **Analytical sample size** | 225 qualified respondents |
| **Margin of error (95% confidence level)** | +/- 6% |
| **Data access** | **https://zenodo.org/communities/linux-foundation-research** |
| **Declaration of AI in the research process** | LF Research uses generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in varying degrees for research-related tasks including aggregating secondary sources, synthesizing data, supporting report drafting, copyediting, and translation. All AI-generated content is reviewed and revised as needed. |

# Survey demographics

Having covered the COSS strategic playbook in detail, it's worth stepping back for a moment to describe the ecosystem from a higher level. In this section, we describe some basic characteristics of the COSS companies in our respondent pool in an effort to place our study into context and give it some external validity.

COSS companies are concentrated in developer-facing infrastructure but span a wide range of profiles. **Infrastructure (31%), business applications (30%), and developer tools (25%) are the most common product categories**, with **AI/ML close behind at 24%** (Table A28). Respondents are also geographically balanced. Although **most COSS companies are located in the US (36%) and EU (35%)**, a wide number of disparate regions have a non-trivial COSS representation, underscoring how **broadly international the commercial open source movement has become** (Table A29).

That geographic breadth is matched by a wide spread in maturity and scale. **Self-funded companies form the largest single funding cohort (35%)**, but public companies still make up 16% of the sample (Table A30). Company size tells a similar story. **Small COSS companies are somewhat overrepresented in our sample, with 54% of respondents employing fewer than 50 people**, yet 14% are large incumbents with 5,000 or more employees (Table A31).

Company age, revenue scale, and growth rate all reinforce this bimodality of small and large COSS companies. Nearly half (49%) of companies are more than 7 years old versus 16% under 2 years (Table A32). **43% report under $1M in ARR versus 20% above $100M with a $3M sample median (Table A33)**. Half of companies grow a modest 0–25% year-over-year, 12% grow more than 200% against a 13% sample median (Table A34). Early-stage entrants and established, fast- and slow-growing players are all well represented.

**44% of commercialized OSS projects are more than 7 years old**, meaning most project roots predate or roughly coincide with the founding of the commercializing company itself (Table A36). It takes time to build a community COSS product and deep, long-standing project ownership is the norm, not the exception.

Responses behind this report skew toward a builder and operator perspective: **founders and CEOs account for 42% of respondents**, while director-level roles and below represent just 15% (Table A37). That composition indicates that our findings in this study reflect the perspective of people setting COSS strategy, not simply executing it.

# Appendix

**TABLE A1**

## What are your primary competitive threats?

(select all that apply, maximum of three)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Proprietary / closed-source vendors | 54% |
| Other commercial OSS companies | 37% |
| DIY solutions at customers | 32% |
| Hyperscalers (e.g. AWS, Azure, GCP, etc.) offering similar services | 25% |
| Our own OSS product | 20% |
| Forks of our project | 15% |
| Other (please specify) | 8% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q16. Number of respondents = 168. Total responses = 321.

**TABLE A2**

## What are the primary reasons customers choose your product over closed-source alternatives? (select all that apply, maximum of three)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Lower total cost of ownership | 40% |
| Customizability / ability to self-host and modify | 38% |
| Avoidance of vendor lock-in | 34% |
| Data sovereignty / regulatory compliance | 34% |
| Superior technical performance | 33% |
| Bottom-up adoption (engineers already using the OSS version) | 28% |
| Transparency / ability to inspect source code | 27% |
| Other (please specify) | 5% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q17. Number of respondents = 171. Total responses = 410.

**TABLE A3**

## Which capabilities do you reserve for your commercial offering? (select all that apply)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Enterprise integrations | 63% |
| Support level agreements (SLAs) | 63% |
| Advanced analytics / dashboards | 49% |
| Audit logging / compliance features | 48% |
| Authentication, identity based (e.g. SSO) | 40% |
| Authentication, permissions based (e.g. RBAC) | 40% |
| High availability / clustering | 40% |
| Security features (encryption, vulnerability scanning) | 37% |
| Performance / scale optimization | 34% |
| Multi-tenancy | 29% |
| Collaboration / team features | 27% |
| Other (please specify) | 10% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q14. Number of respondents = 73. Total responses = 350.

**TABLE A4**

## Which of the following factors have prevented your company from commercializing your open-source project(s) to date? (select all that apply, maximum of three)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| We are still developing the commercial features or offering | 59% |
| We are still building product-market fit for the open source project | 41% |
| We are uncertain about the right business model or pricing strategy | 39% |
| Legal, licensing, or IP considerations are not yet resolved | 29% |
| We are waiting for the right market conditions or timing | 20% |
| We are concerned about community or contributor reaction to commercialization | 15% |
| We lack the sales, marketing, or go-to-market resources to launch commercially | 12% |
| Other (please specify) | 10% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q34. Number of respondents = 41. Total responses = 92.

**TABLE A5**

## What percentage of code contributions to your primary OSS project come from outside your company? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Less than 10% | 53% |
| 10 to 20% | 16% |
| 21 to 30% | 14% |
| 31 to 50% | 6% |
| More than 50% | 11% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q28. Number of respondents = 163.

**TABLE A6**

## Share of COSS companies that track the share of paying customers that start as community users (Q32) by different subgroups

| Respondent subgroup | "We track this information" (percentage of respondents) | "We do not track this information" |
|---|---|---|
| VC-backed companies (Q4) | 27% | 14% |
| AI / ML companies (Q7) | 26% | 14% |
| Respondents who do not track customer conversion rate (Q30) | 22% | 82% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q4, Q7, Q30, Q32. Number of respondents = 145.

**TABLE A7**

## What customer segments does your company target? (select all that apply)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| SMB (less than 500 employees) | 56% |
| Mid-market (500 to 5,000 employees) | 68% |
| Enterprise (more than 5,000 employees) | 63% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q22. Number of respondents = 165. Total responses = 309.

**TABLE A8**

## What are the primary user personas for your core product?

(select all that apply, maximum of three) The user persona refers to the individual who interacts with the product's features.

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Software Engineering & Development | 49% |
| DevOps, IT & Platform Engineering | 49% |
| Data Science & ML Engineering | 24% |
| Business, Finance & Operations | 21% |
| CTO / VP of Engineering | 19% |
| Security & Compliance Professional | 15% |
| CEO / Founder | 11% |
| CIO / VP of Infrastructure | 9% |
| Other (please specify) | 6% |
| CISO / Security Leadership | 5% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q20. Number of respondents = 173. Total responses = 361.

**TABLE A9**

## What are the primary buyer personas for your core product?

(select all that apply, maximum of three) The buyer persona focuses on the stakeholder holds the authority to approve the purchase.

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| CTO / VP of Engineering | 46% |
| CIO / VP of Infrastructure | 31% |
| Software Engineering & Development | 25% |
| DevOps, IT & Platform Engineering | 25% |
| Business, Finance & Operations | 25% |
| CEO / Founder | 17% |
| Security & Compliance Professional | 15% |
| CISO / Security Leadership | 14% |
| Data Science & ML Engineering | 13% |
| Other (please specify) | 5% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q21. Number of respondents = 169. Total responses = 366.

**TABLE A10**

## What is your pricing model? (select all that apply)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Usage-based (consumption) | 46% |
| Tier-based (feature bundles at fixed price points) | 42% |
| Seat-based (per user) | 28% |
| Flat-rate (single price, unlimited usage) | 28% |
| Other (please specify) | 14% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q11. Number of respondents = 168. Total responses = 264.

**TABLE A11**

## Which revenue models does your company currently use?

(select all that apply)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Support & professional services | 62% |
| Managed cloud service / SaaS | 49% |
| Open core (free OSS + proprietary features) | 43% |
| Dual licensing (open source + commercial license) | 25% |
| Training & certification | 24% |
| Marketplace / ecosystem integrations | 14% |
| Other (please specify) | 4% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q12. Number of respondents = 173. Total responses = 382.

**TABLE A12**

## Based on your answers from the previous question, which revenue model generates the largest share of your total revenue today? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Support & professional services | 38% |
| Managed cloud service / SaaS | 24% |
| Open core (free OSS + proprietary features) | 18% |
| Dual licensing (open source + commercial license) | 9% |
| Marketplace / ecosystem integrations | 7% |
| [Insert text from Other] | 3% |
| Training & certification | 2% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q13. Number of respondents = 116.

**TABLE A13**

## Which licensing strategy do you use for your commercial OSS project or projects?

(select all that apply) Choose multiple responses if your licensing strategy varies by component.

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Permissive (MIT, Apache 2.0, BSD) | 64% |
| Strong copyleft (GPL, AGPL) | 30% |
| Source-available / non-OSI approved (BSL, SSPL, Elastic License) | 20% |
| Weak copyleft (LGPL, MPL) | 13% |
| Other (please specify) | 4% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q18. Number of respondents = 158. Total responses = 206.

**TABLE A14**

## What is your go-to-market motion today? (select all that apply)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Product-led growth (PLG) — self-serve dominant | 48% |
| Enterprise sales-led — outbound / relationship-driven | 47% |
| Sales-assisted PLG — self-serve with sales support | 41% |
| Channel / partner-led | 28% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q23. Number of respondents = 161. Total responses = 265.

**TABLE A15**

## What percentage of your operating budget is allocated to sales & marketing? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Less than 10% | 48% |
| 10 to 20% | 25% |
| 21 to 30% | 17% |
| 31 to 40% | 7% |
| 41 to 50% | 1% |
| More than 50% | 1% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q24. Number of respondents = 136.

**TABLE A16**

## What is your approximate conversion rate from free/OSS users to paying customers? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Less than 0.5% | 11% |
| 0.5 to 1% | 8% |
| 1 to 2% | 7% |
| 2 to 5% | 13% |
| 5 to 10% | 13% |
| More than 10% | 11% |
| We do not track this information | 38% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q30. Number of respondents = 136.

**TABLE A17**

## What is your approximate CAC (customer acquisition cost) payback period in months? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Less than 6 months | 31% |
| 6 to 12 months | 28% |
| 12 to 18 months | 7% |
| 18 to 24 months | 8% |
| We do not track this information | 25% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q25. Number of respondents = 123.

**TABLE A18**

## What is your typical time from first OSS usage to first paid contract? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Less than 1 month | 4% |
| 1 to 3 months | 14% |
| 3 to 6 months | 11% |
| 6 to 12 months | 16% |
| More than 12 months | 13% |
| We do not track this information | 42% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q31. Number of respondents = 137.

**TABLE A19**

## How has the rise of AI impacted your business over the past 12 months? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Strong net positive impact | 36% |
| Moderate net positive impact | 36% |
| Neutral — no meaningful impact | 20% |
| Moderate net negative impact | 5% |
| Strong net negative impact | 3% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q37. Number of respondents = 173.

**TABLE A20**

## In what ways has the rise of AI negatively impacted your business? (select all that apply)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Harder to compete for attention / funding | 50% |
| Reduced demand for our core product | 36% |
| Pressure to add AI features / Increased customer expectations | 36% |
| Hyperscalers / AI-native competitors entering our space | 21% |
| Other (please specify) | 14% |
| Talent drain to AI companies | 7% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q39. Number of respondents = 14. Total responses = 23.

**TABLE A21**

## AI sentiment by primary COSS product category

| Primary Product Category | AI Positive | Not AI Positive |
|---|---|---|
| AI | 88% | 13% |
| Devtools | 77% | 23% |
| Platform / Infrastructure | 72% | 28% |
| Applications / Other | 74% | 26% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q7, Q37. Number of respondents = 173.

**TABLE A22**

## AI sentiment by COSS growth stage

| ARR | AI Positive | Not AI Positive |
|---|---|---|
| < $5M | 70% | 30% |
| $5M – $20M | 63% | 37% |
| > $20M | 81% | 19% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q8, Q37. Number of respondents = 149.

**TABLE A23**

## In what ways has the rise of AI positively impacted your business? (select all that apply)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Improved internal productivity / development velocity | 73% |
| New use cases / expanded TAM | 46% |
| AI features becoming a monetization lever | 39% |
| Increased demand for our core product | 37% |
| Increased investor appetite for our company | 24% |
| Attracted more contributors / community interest | 22% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q38. Number of respondents = 125. Total responses = 300.

**TABLE A24**

## AI Outcomes by Industry — share citing each benefit

(q0038 × q0007)

| | AI | Devtools | Platform/ Infrastructure | Applications/ Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Improved internal productivity / development velocity | 66% | 76% | 71% | 76% |
| New use cases / expanded TAM | 51% | 50% | 48% | 43% |
| Increased demand for our core product | 46% | 41% | 44% | 35% |
| AI features becoming a monetization lever | 34% | 38% | 45% | 41% |
| Attracted more contributors / community interest | 29% | 21% | 25% | 22% |
| Increased investor appetite for our company | 31% | 21% | 29% | 15% |

**TABLE A25**

## How has the rise of AI influenced your company's business model? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Other (please specify) | 1% |
| AI is foundational to our business model | 17% |
| AI has prompted us to meaningfully rework or evolve our existing business model | 23% |
| AI has introduced incremental changes (e.g., new pricing levers, added features) but our core model is intact | 32% |
| AI has had no meaningful impact on our business model | 26% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q40. Number of respondents = 170.

**TABLE A26**

## How would you best describe your business model or product's relation to AI? (select all that apply)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| We build AI/ML models or applications (AI-native) | 54% |
| We provide data/tooling for AI/ML pipelines | 54% |
| We provide infrastructure for AI/ML (compute, training, serving) | 51% |
| AI/ML is a feature within our product, not the core | 22% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q36. Number of respondents = 41. Total responses = 74.

**TABLE A27**

## How are you sourcing the AI/ML models that power your product? (select all that apply)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Integrating proprietary third-party AI APIs (e.g., OpenAI, Anthropic, Google, XAI) | 53% |
| Fine-tuning open source foundation models (e.g. DeepSeek, Qwen, Llama, Mistral, etc.) on our own data | 32% |
| Using open source foundation models without modification | 29% |
| Partnering with an AI vendor under a commercial agreement | 26% |
| Building and training proprietary models in-house | 24% |
| Other (please specify) | 3% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q41. Number of respondents = 38. Total responses = 63.

**TABLE A28**

## What is your company's primary product category?

(select all that apply, maximum of three)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Infrastructure (compute, storage, networking) | 31% |
| Business Applications | 30% |
| Developer tools (CI/CD, IDEs, testing) | 25% |
| AI / ML | 24% |
| Databases, Data & Analytics | 19% |
| Security | 19% |
| Cloud native | 16% |
| Other (please specify) | 15% |
| Observability / Monitoring | 11% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q7. Number of respondents = 182. Total responses = 346.

**TABLE A29**

## Where is your company headquartered? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| United States | 36% |
| European Union | 35% |
| China | 8% |
| United Kingdom | 5% |
| Asia Pacific (except China, India, Japan, and Oceania) | 3% |
| Africa | 3% |
| India | 3% |
| Canada | 2% |
| Non-EU European country (except UK) | 2% |
| Other country/region (please specify) | 1% |
| Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America | 1% |
| Japan | 1% |
| Middle East | 1% |

ource: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q6. Number of respondents = 182.

**TABLE A30**

## What is your company's current funding stage? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Other (please specify) | 5% |
| Self-funded | 35% |
| Pre-seed | 5% |
| Seed | 12% |
| Series A | 12% |
| Series B | 3% |
| Series C+ | 5% |
| Private equity | 6% |
| Public company | 16% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q4. Number of respondents = 178.

**TABLE A31**

## How many employees does your organization have worldwide? (select one) Your best estimate is fine.

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| 1 to 9 | 29% |
| 10 to 49 | 25% |
| 50 to 99 | 7% |
| 100 to 499 | 10% |
| 500 to 999 | 6% |
| 1,000 to 4,999 | 9% |
| 5,000 to 19,999 | 4% |
| 20,000 or more | 9% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q5. Number of respondents = 181.

**TABLE A32**

## How many years has your company been in operation? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Less than 1 year | 6% |
| 1 to 2 years | 10% |
| 2 to 4 years | 21% |
| 4 to 7 years | 14% |
| More than 7 years | 49% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q10. Number of respondents = 179.

**TABLE A33**

## What is your company's current annual recurring revenue (ARR)? (select one) Approximate responses are perfectly acceptable.

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Less than $100K | 19% |
| $100K to $1M | 24% |
| $1M to $5M | 19% |
| $5M to $20M | 10% |
| $20M to $50M | 5% |
| $50M to $100M | 3% |
| More than $100M | 20% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q8. Number of respondents = 155.

**TABLE A34**

## What is your year-over-year revenue growth rate? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Less than 0% (negative growth or contraction) | 5% |
| 0 to 25% | 50% |
| 26 to 50% | 17% |
| 51 to 100% | 10% |
| 101 to 200% | 6% |
| More than 200% | 12% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q9. Number of respondents = 139.

**TABLE A35**

## How did your company come to commercialize an OSS project? (select all that apply)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| We founded the project | 71% |
| We forked an existing OSS project | 18% |
| We became the primary maintainer over time | 17% |
| We acquired the project or the company that created it | 14% |
| We partnered with the original creator(s) | 14% |
| Other (please specify) | 3% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q27. Number of respondents = 170. Total responses = 231.

**TABLE A36**

## How old is the open source project your company commercializes? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Less than 1 year | 9% |
| 1 to 2 years | 13% |
| 2 to 4 years | 19% |
| 4 to 7 years | 16% |
| More than 7 years | 44% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q26. Number of respondents = 173.

**TABLE A37**

## Which best describes your current role? (select one)

| Response | % of respondents |
|---|---|
| Founder / CEO | 42% |
| Other (please specify) | 20% |
| Director-level or below | 15% |
| C-level executive (CTO, CFO, COO, CRO) | 10% |
| VP Engineering / Product | 9% |
| VP Sales / Marketing / Revenue | 4% |

Source: 2026 Commercial Open Source Software Survey. Q3. Number of respondents = 182.

# About the authors



**Sam Boysel** is a Data Scientist at the Linux Foundation. In this role, he contributes to a variety of empirical initiatives to uncover new insights into open source communities. His work often leverages microeconomic theory to analyze behaviors, incentives, and community dynamics across open source ecosystems. Before joining the Linux Foundation, he was a postdoctoral researcher with the Laboratory for Innovation Science at Harvard. He holds a B.A., M.S., and Ph.D. in Economics.



**Matthieu Lavergne** is a Partner at Serena, where he leads pre-seed and seed investments in infrastructure software. He focuses on products designed for technical personas—developers, data teams, CTOs, and IT leaders—particularly in Open Source, DevOps, data infrastructure, and applied AI.

He is the lead author of the Commercial Open Source Software (COSS) Report, a widely referenced publication that analyzes the financial models and strategic dynamics of Open Source companies. His research informs founders, investors, and ecosystem platforms on how to build and scale viable COSS businesses.



**Anni Lai** is a longtime open source community builder, advocate, and evangelist. With nearly a decade of active involvement in the global open source ecosystem, she has supported developer communities across more than 40 countries and five continents. She currently serves as Co-Chair of the Generative AI Commons and an elected board member of LF AI & Data, and she also advises LF Europe, GOSIM, and KAIYUANSHE and leads the Open Source Operations at Futurewei. Anni is a passionate believer that AI should serve the global population—rooted in ethics, trust, and openness. Anni holds a B.A. and an M.S. in Computer Science from Rutgers University and San José State University, respectively.

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