

FROM OPEN SOURCE PROJECT TO SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

APELL

Association Professionnelle
Européenne du Logiciel Libre

The European Open Source
Software Business Association

Turning adoption into customer value, recurring resources and community vitality

Timo Väliharju · APELL · 8 September 2026

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Adoption does not automatically create sustainable resources

PROJECT

Useful
technology
Maintainers and
contributors

ADOPTION

Users and
visibility
Growing
expectations

RESOURCE GAP

Security, support,
sales
and governance
compete

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

Paying
customers
Repeatable
revenue
Community
investment

The difficult transition is from widespread use to funded responsibility.

A 90-minute route from project to sustainable business

0–10

Define the resource gap

10–33

Buyer, value and first offer

33–48

Design the revenue architecture

48–67

Repeatable delivery and ecosystem

67–72

Choose the bottleneck

72–90

Discussion and close

Questions and comments are welcome throughout in the chat.

10% technology — 90% community vitality

TECHNOLOGY

- Useful code
- Security and quality
- Maintainable architecture
- Credible roadmap

COMMUNITY VITALITY

- Maintainers and users
- Contributors and partners
- Governance and trust
- Resources to keep going

The interaction matters: technology attracts participation — a vital community keeps the technology relevant.

Even widely adopted projects compete for scarce resources

- Usage and visibility do not automatically pay for maintenance or security.
- Users may depend on the software without owning a budget or responsibility for it.
- Documentation, governance, marketing and sales compete with feature work.
- Grants can start development but rarely secure long-term operating capacity.
- A small maintainer group is often expected to build, support, govern and commercialise everything.

The most common gap is not technology — it is go-to-market

POSITION

Translate features into a costly customer problem

TARGET

Name the segment, buyer and budget owner

REACH

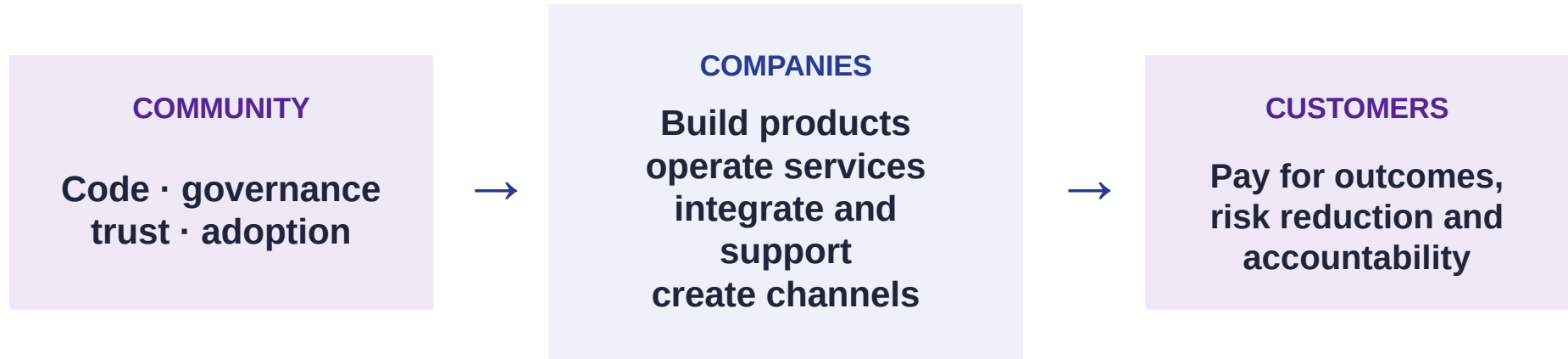
Build systematic outreach beyond developer channels

CONVERT

Turn interest into a pilot, offer and buying decision

Sales is a learning process: ten customer conversations often teach more than another feature.

Business can sit around the shared asset



Money may flow to a company, a foundation or both — value must also flow back upstream.

Seven practical business models can be combined

1 SERVICES	Integration, migration and custom development	5 TRAINING	Courses, certification and enablement
2 SUPPORT	Assurance, maintenance and response commitments	6 PARTNERS	Membership, certification, leads and brand rights
3 MANAGED SERVICE	Hosting, operation, updates and security	7 SPONSORSHIP	Roadmap dialogue and support for shared infrastructure
4 SUBSCRIPTION	Product features, automation or enterprise tooling		

Start with one lead engine. Add another only when customers or partners pull it into existence.

Audience challenge: turn adoption into a business

50,000 downloads · 8,000 active installations · 20 contributors
Several municipalities and companies use it · Revenue remains occasional

IN THE CHAT

Who should pay — and what should the first paid offer be?

Write: CUSTOMER + OFFER. Keep it to one line.

We will compare three contrasting answers.

Which offer would you launch first?

A

Managed hosting

B

**Security and
compliance
subscription**

C

**Integration and
support**

D

**Training and
certification**

Vote A–D in the BBB poll. What does your choice assume about the customer?

One credible open-source revenue architecture

ILLUSTRATIVE BUSINESS CASE

Managed service	Hosting, operation, updates and security	RECURRING
Enterprise assurance	Support, compliance and accountability	RECURRING
Certified partners	Membership, enablement and qualified leads	ECOSYSTEM
Migration & onboarding	Implementation and customer adoption	PROJECT
HEALTHY MIX	Funds delivery — and the shared asset	

Which revenue engine should lead — and what does it finance?

Scaling means revenue grows faster than delivery effort

SERVICES-LED

Revenue grows with hours

Useful for learning and early cash flow

PRODUCT-LED

Revenue grows faster than delivery effort

Repeatable delivery and recurring revenue

The goal is not “no services”. It is to turn repeated work into reusable capability.

Usage alone rarely funds the community

Many companies rely on open source but see no clear reason to contribute money or staff time.

COMMUNITY	Newsletter, events and public roadmap
BRONZE	Recognition and partner directory
SILVER	Training, early information and working groups
GOLD	Roadmap workshops, leads and certification
STRATEGIC	Long-term funding and structured co-development

Partner fees, staff time and upstream contributions need a credible value exchange.

What the interviews teach us about building a business

FOCUS

One narrow customer segment beats a broad market

BUYER

Reach the person who owns the problem and budget

PROOF

Test willingness to pay before building more

FOUNDER SALES

Early customer learning cannot be outsourced

ONE OFFER

One tested paid offer beats many revenue ideas

REPEAT

Productise only the work customers repeatedly buy

Repeated lesson: commercialisation advances through customer conversations, not internal planning.

Europe has an open-source commercialisation gap

Promising projects of every size need a bridge from adoption to sustainable capacity.

FIRST CUSTOMERS

Demand that pays for reusable product capacity

COMMERCIAL CAPABILITY

Product, pricing, sales and customer success

EUROPEAN CHANNELS

Integrators and partners that cross borders

LONG-TERM CAPITAL

Funding that understands open-source value and governance

A company can earn from the ecosystem in six different roles

MAINTAINER

Fund development and lifecycle expertise

PRODUCT COMPANY

Package usability, automation and enterprise features

OPERATOR

Run the software securely as a managed service

INTEGRATOR

Adapt it to customer systems and processes

ASSURANCE PROVIDER

Provide support, compliance and accountability

CHANNEL PARTNER

Sell, implement or certify across markets

The same company may play several roles — but the customer must understand what it is buying.

Sustainable growth comes from removing one constraint at a time

Assume the project already has adoption and a credible first paid offer.

A

**Product and
security**

B

**Community and
upstream**

C

**Sales and
customer
success**

D

**Partners and
international
expansion**

Do not choose yet. First identify the binding constraint on the next slide.

Invest against the bottleneck, not personal preference

A PROVE

Can one segment pay repeatedly?

B REPEAT

Can we deliver without custom work?

C EXPAND

Can partners and channels reproduce sales?

D DEFEND

Can trust, governance and security survive growth?

Vote A–D in the BBB poll: which stage is your binding constraint?

What should Europe change first?

A DEMAND	Procurement that rewards reusable products and upstream contribution
B CAPITAL	Investment that understands open-source value and governance
C CAPABILITY	Commercial, product and internationalisation skills
D MARKET	European channels and interoperable cross-border demand

Vote A–D in the BBB poll. What concrete action follows from your choice?

Three tensions have no universal answer

1 OPENNESS

How much differentiation can a company build without weakening the shared asset?

2 SCALE

When should a services-led organisation invest in a repeatable product?

3 EUROPE

Which should lead: market demand, private capital or public policy?

The right answer depends on the project — but the trade-off must be explicit.

What stops a project becoming a sustainable business?

15-MINUTE FINAL DISCUSSION

What is the single biggest obstacle preventing an open-source project from building a business that can also sustain its community?

DIAGNOSE

Is the missing element demand, commercial capability, funding or governance?

OWN

Who must solve it: company, community, customer or public sector?

ACT

What can be done during the next 12 months?

Post in the chat or raise your hand. Keep contributions concrete.

Five principles for sustainable open-source business

- 1** Start with a buyer, a budget and a costly outcome.
- 2** Treat marketing and sales as systematic customer learning.
- 3** Choose one lead revenue engine before combining models.
- 4** Productise repeated work so revenue can grow beyond hours.
- 5** Give companies a concrete reason to contribute money, people or upstream work.

WHAT WILL YOUR CUSTOMER PAY FOR —
AND HOW WILL THE BUSINESS KEEP THE COMMUNITY VITAL?

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Commercial success should strengthen the commons it depends on.

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