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Contributing to FOSS: A Business Perspective

Last weekend I had the pleasure of presenting at the [Central Pennsylvania Open Source Conference](#) on the topic of *Contributing to FOSS* ([slides available here](#)).

In the talk I explored the many ways individuals can get involved in FOSS (Free and Open Source Software), briefly covering everything from programming to artwork to documentation. As diverse as these contributions are, the common thread is close collaboration with the project itself. In particular, following the procedures in place for contributing to the project is essential. The talk also reviewed some of the benefits of contributing to FOSS, which include career advancement and the ability to expand your professional network.

Although my presentation focused on individual contributions, these lessons also apply to how businesses benefit by contributing to FOSS. When a business approaches a project they should attempt to build a symbiotic relationship with the community. Such a relationship involves following the established community procedures so that your contributions can be easily adopted by the project. Useful scripts and code developments made within the company that can be useful to the greater public should be contributed back and packaging of popular software within the company can be submitted for inclusion and use by the greater community. Testing and bug reporting based on experience using FOSS on their production (or development) systems can provide important information for FOSS developers about the health and status of their projects.

Benefits for businesses that we at [LinuxForce](#) have seen first hand are referrals for projects based on documentation work completed on popular community websites (such as [Debian-Administration.org](#)) and feedback on our approach leading to improved best practices and building a reputation as experts. By sharing code with projects, others can build upon it to produce more functionality than your team could muster on its own, creating better software for everyone. Additionally, our involvement has allowed us to foster development of Debian packages for software that is used by our clients by, for instance, improving automatic database configuration support and making sure up to date packages are included in releases.

In conclusion, when a business contributes to FOSS they can help drum up business by building a reputation and doing real work within the community, and they help their customers by being on the forefront of development direction and discussions for software that is vital for their own organizations. Contributing to FOSS is good for business, good for your customers, good for the community, and good for the FOSS ecosystem in general.

Posted by Elizabeth Krumbach in FOSS Community, News, 0 comments