

Why Commercial Open Source?

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Project and Portfolio Management

Project and Portfolio Management (PPM) solutions provide visibility into a corporation's investments of human and material resources. They supply the information necessary to invest a corporation's capital into projects that provide the best return on their investment. By increasing the efficiency of a corporation's resources, PPM solutions provide a strategic tool for creating a competitive advantage in this increasingly global business environment.

I am told all the time by customers that the actual cost of licenses and implementation of a PPM solution is far outweighed by the potential competitive advantage it provides. Users of PPM solutions consistently value:

- Strategic Alignment – Is a project important?
- Visibility and Transparency – Can I monitor the project to make sure it stays on track?
- Governance – Is a project being executed according to our rules?

Surprisingly, although no one wants to pay too much, minimizing the cost of a PPM is typically not a primary goal, but rather one that is overshadowed by the need to remain competitive.

Open Source Provides a Superior Project and Portfolio Management Solution

Commercial Open Source

So given this business environment, why does a “free” open source solution make sense? Anybody familiar with the rhetoric of open source can point out the hundreds and perhaps thousands of open source projects that start with a big bang, never mature, never see a major release, and completely lack support. If you talk to your corporate counsel, you will hear concerns over “viral licenses” and requirements that any investment you make in proprietary additions must be, by law, shared with your competition or anyone else who wants the information. With the amount of FUD (fear, uncertainty and doubt) often generated by the marketing departments of proprietary solutions, it is no wonder that when I tell potential customers that Project.net is open source, I sometimes sense worry instead of relief. Conventional wisdom is that an open source solution is a risky decision for a corporation.

Conventional wisdom is wrong. In fact, creating the best PPM solution for your company requires an open source solution. That is why I have decided to release Project.net under a **commercial open source** license. By selecting Project.net open source, I believe you will be taking the less risky path to creating a superior PPM solution that is finely tuned to your corporation's processes and structure.

To illustrate my point, let me establish what open source is and what it means to you. I will also explain what a commercial open source license is and why it precludes many of the concerns regarding open source software.

Software developers write applications in a computer language such as Java or C++ that is eventually compiled into an application. The statements they write are known as source code. If you have the source code to an application, a software developer can customize and modify the application to do anything you need it to do.

Open source at its most basic level means that the source code is freely available to everybody. This means a corporation can either use its own software development resources or contract with a third party to take this source code and tailor it to their specific needs. Sounds pretty good, right? If you need a special function, you do not have to negotiate and plead with a vendor. Instead, you let your software developers create the functions themselves, tailoring it to your exact specifications.

Now this is where legal concerns get in the way of an excellent idea. All open source software is released under a copyright agreement that provides specific rights and obligations. It should be no surprise that there are many different open source licenses.

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The problem is that some of the agreements actually require open source code users to provide all of their changes to everybody, including their competitors.

This is **NOT** the type of license I am using for Project.net. Instead, I have chosen to release Project.net under a commercial open source license. Although there are plenty of other details, the basic idea of a commercial open source license is that it provides you with the application's source code without any obligation to share any modifications or enhancements you make with anyone else. (Though you may choose to share when sharing is beneficial). So, in the future when your competitor reads about all the success you have had with Project.net, feel free to tell them "No" if they ask for your modifications.

PPM and Commercial Open Source – A Winning Combination

Returning to my opening remarks, you might now be wondering what open source has to do with PPM solutions. Over the last year, I have asked customers about the risks and concerns of implementing a PPM solution. Almost every customer I talked to told me that they only have one chance to introduce a PPM into their companies. They fear that if the PPM solution fails to capture their company's business processes, it will be circumvented and eventually lose management support. I have heard several horror stories where an expensive PPM solution was purchased and later shelved because it interfered with getting projects done. When this happens, my customers tell me that they have to wait years before it comes back on the corporate agenda.

Open source directly addresses the concern that the vendor's vision of how a PPM is to be used conflicts with its actual use. If Project.net has a mismatch with your business processes, don't try changing your business processes – that rarely works. Just change Project.net. If you have your own information systems that you want to integrate into Project.net, just change Project.net. If your users want the user interface modified to fit the style of your other corporate applications, just change Project.net. If you have the available development engineers, you can do it yourself on your schedule. If you don't have the engineers, I will be happy to supply them. With the product source code, you have the ability to customize Project.net exactly to your company's specifications, in much less time and at a much lower cost of financial and human resources than designing your own PPM solution.

Open source is the right mechanism for delivering PPM solutions because PPM solutions have to fit smoothly into your existing corporate infrastructure. Companies spend a large portion of their yearly investment in PPM systems customizing general PPM solutions into the existing business processes of their corporation. Proprietary solutions either require customers to accept less than full customization, or force the purchase of an expensive source code license.

Under Project.net's commercial open source license, you get the source code for free. All that is left to do is the customization, which is not restricted. Furthermore, you can spend all the money you had budgeted for licenses on this customization.

People often ask me how Project.net is going to make money under this license. After all, it is important to any user of PPM that the supplier continues to release new versions of the application and fix bugs. Actually, the answer is pretty simple. Project.net makes money that supports ongoing enhancements from the sale of subscriptions, licenses, and services to those customers that prefer commercial software.

By signing up for a subscription or purchasing a more traditional license, your users are assured of a timely and efficient response to problems. By using Project.net's professional services to install, configure, and customize your Project.net deployment, you are assured an efficient implementation that uses the best practices that we have learned by doing this for many customers. Project.net will thus be able to continue to support and enhance the product, to the benefit of you, our customer.

It may take some getting used to, but commercial open source is the way of the future for PPM and enterprise software in general. It addresses the concerns of implementing an effective and custom PPM without forcing you to share your application enhancements with your competitors. I am proud to say that Project.net has seen the future and is leading the way to create superior PPM solutions for you and your organization.