

Open Source Pros Pick their Favorite Projects

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By [James Maguire](#)

There is, to be sure, no lack of "top software" lists in the open source world (or in software in general). The Internet is drowning in such lists.

You'll see lists like [The 7 Most Influential GNU/Linux Distributions](#), [Top 35 Firefox Add-ons for Fun](#), and [49 Open Source Projects in the Spotlight](#). The variety of such lists is endless.

But these compendiums, however helpful, are typically created by tech journalists. People who are observers and reporters. What about the top picks of actual community leaders? The people who have worked to build open source from the ground up?

To spotlight these, *Datamation* polled some movers and shakers across a broad spectrum of the open source community – top professionals in open source. Here are their choices for favorite or most noteworthy open source projects and/or developments:

Jeff Waugh

Director of the [GNOME Foundation](#)

Jeff says that his choices are mostly "projects that make GNOME rock!"

[WordPress](#) and [WordPress MU](#) (multi-user)

"Blogs and planet sites have had a huge impact on communication in the FLOSS [Free/Libre/Open Source Software] world. GNOME and WordPress share many of the same philosophies about usability and development, so it's not surprising that heaps of GNOME contributors use WordPress, and we've recently deployed WordPress MU on [blogs.gnome.org](#). WordPress rocks."

[Bugzilla](#)

"Perpetually overlooked as one of the most important FLOSS apps, even though it is absolutely crucial to the development of so many others: Mozilla, GNOME, Apache, Eclipse, OpenOffice.org...the list goes on - even NASA uses it! Bugzilla makes GNOME rock harder."

[One Laptop per Child](#)

"Using GNOME technologies throughout, the OLPC project has created an amazing user interface for kids, and contributed some great technologies to the FLOSS world along the way -- coming soon to GNOME! The best bit is that OLPC will take Software Freedom to millions, if not billions of kids around the world."

[Cairo](#)

"One of the classic 'behind the scenes' projects that has contributed to so many projects throughout the FLOSS world. It lies deep in the core of GNOME's rendering technologies, not only delivering beautiful graphics, but a totally delicious API for software developers as well."

[Evolution](#)

"Okay, okay, I have to plug at least one GNOME application! Evo might not be the newest or sexiest GNOME app, but it is indispensable as one of our core communications tools, and its

features help many users shift to FLOSS platforms - particularly in corporate environments. The next release will even have Google Calendar and Exchange MAPI support -- sweet!"

Lee Congdon

Vice president of Information Technology, [Red Hat](#)

[Zimbra](#)

"It provides a robust, standards-based email, calendaring and collaboration solution that is intuitive, well-supported, straightforward to deploy, and supports a wide range of clients."

[JBoss Hibernate](#)

"Hibernate provides great balance between general applicability and suitability to task. It is valuable in almost every development effort using a database."

[OpenOffice](#)

"This is a bread and butter application for us: we use it throughout our business. And, as open source, it provides great value when compared to proprietary solutions."

Sebastian Kugler

[KDE](#) developer, marketing manager, and all around project builder

[Xorg](#)

"Vast improvements in development process (more open), new features and prospected features. Especially the efforts for freeing the ATI drivers are notable."

[KDE/Plasma](#)

"Creating a new desktop shell from scratch including development community, and all that in just a couple of months."

[Free Software Foundation Europe](#)

"The FSFE is supporting Free Software projects in a unique way, through mindshare and legal help (e.g. licensing issues).

Marten Mickos

CEO of [MySQL AB](#)

[memcached](#)

"Key to scaling for many leading Web 2.0 companies."

[Maatkit](#)

"Great example of what one person can do in a huge community."

[PrimeBase XT](#)

"Demonstration that transactional storage engines can be developed rapidly for MySQL."

[XAMPP](#)

"An amazing service for those looking for convenience: XAMPP provides easy-to-use AMP stacks in one downloadable and installable file, and they have impressive downloads (stats on their site)."

Hadoop

"Very exciting new project around scaling with vast amounts of data."

Simon Crosby

CTO, [XenSource](#)

Open Solaris

"Sun's answer to Linux – a high performance, highly scalable community driven OS that has all the enterprise features of Solaris. Most notable is the way that Sun has built its community and is now recovering from the initial PR hit of Linux. Solaris is a superb OS, including the ZFS file system."

Mozilla

"Continues to drive innovation in delivery of web based applications – becoming the standard browser for Google, preferred by Google, and with dramatically improved security."

Xen

"The open source hypervisor has spawned a number of products significant to the enterprise datacenter."

Stormy Peters

Director of Community and Partner Programs, [Open Logic](#)

"I picked my favorites based on the communities," she says.

Linux kernel

"They sometimes get a bad rap but this project does a phenomenal job of coordinating all the different people, interest groups and companies and still sticking to their ideals."

Apache httpd

"The Apache Foundation is a model that most open source projects can strive for. It has a very large, welcoming community that turns out some great projects, just look at how prevalent the Apache web server is!"

GNOME

"My introduction into open source was through the GNOME community and so they have a special place in my heart. I have to say they were extremely welcoming from day one."

Stormy tells the story of that day: "I was in Denmark going to my first open source conference ever ([GUADEC](#)) and when I walked in the door, the woman at the check-in table yelled – very loudly! – "YOU'RE A GIRL!" It was quite the welcome! She had been wondering ever since I registered. There weren't very many of us women at the conference – or at any open source conference I've been to since – except in Malaysia." GNOME is a "large, successful, open source group that not only has a great product but has a lot of fun creating it!"

Miguel de Icaza

Co-founder of the [GNOME](#) and [Mono](#) projects. Time magazine selected him one of its "100 Innovators for the New Century" in September 2000.

[Compiz Fusion](#)

"Compiz is the eye candy that everyone has been running this year and that has really opened the doors to innovation on the desktop and what is possible by having a powerful 3D engine drive your desktop. What we have seen so far is only the beginning.

"This project, originally created at Novell, has turned into a successful open source effort with many contributors exploring and creating many new effects and understanding what works and what doesn't."

[Ruby on Rails](#)

"It is not a new project, but the growth of this platform for Web development this year continued its quick adoption in the market. It has fascinated countless people who would otherwise hate developing web applications."

Microsoft entrance into OSS with [IronRuby](#) (and [IronPython](#))

"IronRuby is a compiler for the Ruby language that uses the Dynamic Language Runtime from Microsoft and runs on both .NET and Mono. This is the first project in which Microsoft is actually working with the community and taking patches.

"Microsoft has released software under open source licenses in the past, but this is the first time that they are actually accepting external contributions. Another step in the right direction."

Bharat Mediratta

Founder of the [Gallery](#) project, and an engineer at Google.

Choosing his favorite projects is a tough call, Bharat says.

"I tend to use open source as a tool, so really the things that I value the most are the ones that make my life easier. Lately the one that is easing my pain the most is [Debian](#). Its packaging system has been a huge help to me in maintaining my servers."

"On the desktop I get huge value out of [XEmacs](#) and [Firefox](#) I spend more time using them than any other tool. In fact it's safe to say that I do 90 percent of my work with XEmacs and Firefox on a Debian box."

Greg Kroah-Hartman

A [Linux kernel](#) hacker, and the Linux kernel maintainer for PCI, USB, driver core, debugfs, kref, kobject, and the sysfs kernel subsystems.

[Linux Kernel](#)

"Well, obviously I would pick this one, but wait, let me justify it...The Linux kernel is one of the biggest open source projects ever. In the past 2 and 1/2 years, over 3,200 different people have contributed code to the project, and it is running along at over 3 different changes per hour, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. That is an incredible number of people and an incredible rate of development. The operating system kernel that these people have created supports more different hardware types and more different processors than any other operating system ever has in the history of computing, scaling from radio-controlled helicopters, cell phones, desktops, servers, and on up to over 80 percent of the TOP 500 world's supercomputers. This is a computer engineering achievement that has never been accomplished before."

[Gnu Compiler Collection](#)

"Sure, people love to make fun of GCC, how it is slow, bloated, and doesn't generate the 'best' code at times. But by doing that, you overlook the huge success that this project has had over the years. No longer is every individual processor company required to staff a large number of compiler developers, but instead, GCC makes it much easier to add support for their new hardware with a very limited amount of resources. It, like the Linux kernel, is a computer engineering marvel, the likes of which we have never seen before. And because it is freely available, it has enabled the creation of open source operating systems. If it were not present, there would not be a Linux kernel, or many of the BSD projects either. Go hug your local GCC developer and tell them how much you appreciate them, they deserve it more than anyone."

[Git](#)

"Git is a distributed source code control system that is used by the Linux kernel and by a wide range of other open and closed source products. It is extremely fast, robust, and powerful. I can't say enough good things about it and cringe whenever I am forced to use something as slow and backwards as CVS or Subversion."

Michael Meeks

[Novell](#) distinguished engineer

[GNOME](#)

"The pre-eminent Linux desktop, fast, crisp, clean, and the birthplace of lots of recent innovation. Of particular note is the commitment to ongoing ABI stability for ISVs, which apparently hasn't hindered the flow of great new features arriving without disruption."

[OpenOffice](#)

"The app many love to hate is slowly becoming more beautiful: faster startup, lower memory use with an increasing interoperable feature set: how is it done? The cleanups continue. If Sun can loosen its grip on it, OpenOffice is set for stardom and will become a fun place to hack."

[Mono](#)

"A great development platform for building applications, I was blown away with its beauty writing a tool recently; of course - it lets you migrate your applications away from Windows too, that must be good."

Ross Turk

[SourceForge](#) *Community Manager*

Ross explains that it's a little politically incorrect for him to pick favorites: As the community manager at the site that's a motherload of incubating projects, how can he say which ones he likes best?

"Oh boy. Picking winners is dangerous!" he says. "Any of our previous [Project of the Month](#) entries are good choices, though."

When pressed, however, he does select one to spotlight: 'Personally, though, I do think that [dimdim](#) [a free Web meeting service] is particularly interesting. They're just getting started and I want to see them do well.'

Dirk Riehle

Leader of the open source research group at [SAP Labs](#) in Palo Alto, CA.

"From a researcher's perspective, the three most interesting and innovative open source projects (in no particular order):"

[PostgreSQL](#)

"For showing the world how a diverse community can build an excellent database that nobody owns and that benefits everyone."

[MySQL](#)

"For showing the world how to create jobs and how to make money using the dual-license-based commercial open source business model."

[Eclipse \(and IBM\)](#)

"For showing the world the future of software by leading the second generation of community open source."

James Maguire is the managing editor of Datamation.