

# The Art of Open Source War

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# Open Source Software

- Benefits
  - Low-cost software
  - Social communities
  - Anyone can use or modify
  - Free-flow of knowledge
  - Gain knowledge and learn skills
  - Develop reputation
- Challenges
  - Product differentiation
  - Commoditization

# Corporate Motivation

- Generate Revenue
  - Sell software or enhanced version of software
  - Sell value-add above or below
  - Sell hardware that runs software
  - Sell support
- Create affinity with proprietary product
- Create standards
- Marketing / public relations
- Reduce development costs
- Inject competition to distract or undermine competitor



Minor detail

*Participate in Community*

# Method

- How?
  - Assign employees to community
  - Hire developers from community
  - Contract members of the community
  - Contract third-party companies
- Why?
  - Product
  - Business Plan
  - Deliverables

"I don't f\*cking want innovation. You're not smarter than your competitor. Just copy what they do until you get their numbers."  
- Mark Pincus, CEO Zynga



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Maximize shareholder value.

# Competitive cooperation

- Don't trust Open Source in general
- Don't trust community
- Don't trust community leaders
- Don't like license
  - Inhibits business plan
  - Inhibits freedom of action



# Attack vectors

- Gatekeepers
- Governance
- Project members
  
- Technical arguments
- Social arguments

# Dominate project

- Employees dominate community
- Governance rules give company special privileges
- Gatekeepers
  - Control access
  - Control pace and direction of changes
  - Set tone for community
    - Hostile to developers outside company

# Campaign for developers

- Attract developers
  - Equipment loans
  - Special events with travel grants
  - Access to advanced software technology
  - Professional support
    - well-maintained website
    - bug report triage
    - technical documentation
    - Enhanced responsiveness
  - Sponsoring user groups, provide speakers
  - Garner professional awards and appearance of success

Note: SG&A, not R&D budgets!



# Promote competing project

- Divisiveness
  - Use cult recruiting techniques
    - Developers who do not feel appreciated elsewhere
    - Sense of belonging and identity
    - Acquire discipline
    - Acquire special knowledge
    - Gain some power
- Superiority
  - Create aura of exclusivity in project
  - Some ideas can be questioned and others are dogma
- Boost self esteem of developers
  - Recognition: titles, low-level authority, rewards, praise

# Divide and Conquer

- Stress underdog status
- Portray competition as oppressive, unresponsive
  - Competition unredeemable and not worth fixing
- Validate complaints about competition
  - Grass is always greener on the other side
- Utilize "openness" to invade other project
  - Promote competition using resources of original project
- Generate waves of complaints about original project
  - Force community to question itself
  - Make unforced errors
- Gestures of humility from other project are signs of weakness
  - Conciliatory actions are insufficient
  - Lack of cooperation is abuse of dominant position

# Undermine leadership

- Pick the target, Freeze it, Personalize it, Polarize it
- Attack leadership
  - Caricature, scapegoat
  - Strawman arguments
  - Transform technical disagreements to philosophical disputes
  - Ridicule
    - Generate animosity to prevent cooperation
    - Diminish respect within competing community
- Do not humanize competition



# Defenses

- Induce discussions about unexplored doctrine
- Encourage dissension
  - External attacks appear as normal infighting or trolling
- Maintain vitality of original project
- Undermine corporate sponsor of attacking project
- Evolve into diverse, complex social organism
  - Homogeneous population is more vulnerable

Successful companies do not play the game for the sporting challenge.

They play to win.

- Open Source is a campaign for developers
  - Limited resource
- Competition spurs ...
  - Innovation
  - Adaptation
  - Extinction
- Ideas come from connections and networks and inspiration
- Too much divisiveness splinters the network



"If you know your enemies and  
know yourself, you will not be  
imperiled in a hundred battles...."  
- Sun-Tzu, The Art of War