Open:UK

FOUNDERS FORUM

Entrepreneur in Residence and Founders Forum Initial Findings November 2021

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With thanks to all participants in the OpenUK Founders Forum
openuk.uk/foundersforum

1. OpenUK Entrepreneur in Residence, Matt Barker

Matt Barker is President and Co-founder of Jetstack. He's spent his career in open source software vendors, firstly as an early employee at Canonical, the company behind Ubuntu, and then at NoSQL Database company MongoDB, seeing the company grow from a few millions of dollars in revenue to successful Nasdaq IPO.

Although not an engineer by background, he is technically minded, and after becoming interested in the business use cases around software containers, started Jetstack to help companies get value out of Docker and Kubernetes. As CEO he grew the company organically to 30 people and in the process created one of the most-popular cloud native projects in the ecosystem, cert-manager which is downloaded millions of times a day.

Jetstack was acquired by the founders of Machine Identity Management, Venafi Inc. in May 2020. Venafi subsequently took strategic investment from Thoma Bravo in Dec 2020, turning it into a cybersecurity Unicorn with a valuation of $1.15bn.

Following an award as a top 100 Open Source Influencer by OpenUK, he wanted to help the organization further its goals. In April 2021, he took on a position as Entrepreneur in Residence, and brought together OpenUK 'Founder's Forum'. This is a collection of the UK's leading Open Technology entrepreneurs and leaders with a shared goal of:

'Identifying, encouraging and supporting entrepreneurs in the UK who have the potential to, or have recently started an Open Technology business.'

In the first few months of this position, he has run a number of workshops and one-to-one sessions in order to help identify where to focus, and how he can make a difference in this goal. This memo is a reflection of this early research, and a high-level plan on how to do this.

2. Introduction

We're entering an age where Open Technology (open source software, open hardware and open data) is becoming increasingly the norm in 'technology'. We're seeing entire industries standardise on open source software, and rapidly disappearing scepticism from investors as we watch a slew of open technology businesses being built, scaled, and successfully exited.

The reasons for Open Technology being adopted so widely are numerous, but fundamentally, as every business becomes digital, and developers grow in influence, they hold the power to choose the tooling that is most productive for them and bring it into their businesses through access on public repositories like GitHub without the delays of finance or procurement. Open technology permeates through the actual practitioners in an organisation, and is adopted based on its ability to deliver better outcomes. By the time the software gets to production it is rarely displaced.

On the vendor side, Open Technology enables a phenomenal distribution mechanism which can allow small companies with very limited resources to have a huge impact as their projects grow in adoption and influence globally. They're also able to lower the barrier to entry for potential new customers by deploying business models that don't require huge upfront costs and lengthy sales cycles. Models like Open Core, subscription-based pricing, and support contracts. In turn, this allows organisations to capture commercial value at speed - an important step which gives them the resources they need to work with their community and improve product-market fit. This has led to Open Technology gaining an inherent advantage over traditional proprietary companies, and we are rapidly reaching a point where adopting and using open technology no longer becomes a choice, it just becomes the norm or de facto standard. Open Technology can no longer be considered to be the game, but the playing field on which companies compete.

As this trend continues, it creates a moment in time where Open Technology and those using it, are able to take 'first mover advantage'. By embracing leadership in Open Technology, the UK is becoming a world leader, and as a consequence in technology generally.

This will attract many companies to set-up in the UK who will recognise it as having particular benefits:

a.) as a place to leverage Open Technology
b.) as a place to look for help (skills and talent) in building an open tech business

This will bring jobs, wealth, innovation and an ability to help make many more people successful. This success can be measured in relation to increased economic growth, improved skills, collaboration, and sustainability based measures.

3. What does the UK need for increased success in Open Technology?

3.1 Areas we are doing well in:

Fortunately, we already have a number of the ingredients for success, including:

- excellent UK based engineering talent;
- a successful and thriving technical ecosystem, with more billion dollar tech unicorns than the rest of Europe combined;
- strong global connections and a willingness to collaborate;
- a good legal system, and relative ease in starting a company;
- a good number of successful open technology projects and companies; and
- a government willing to support digital innovation, through the likes of Aria which has had world leading Open Technology policies for the last decade;
- Support of seed investment.

3.2 Areas we are losing out on:

- We are losing mindshare and talent to the US, and increasingly to European tech hubs.
- We are competing against the tax breaks offered by Amsterdam, Luxembourg and Ireland.
- We have lost thought leadership from UK government around Open Technology, and digital transformation.
- We are lacking open technology skills in non-engineering areas.
- There is a shortage of engineering talent relative to job availability, and difficulty in finding home-grown talent and attracting enough talent to the UK.

3.3 Conclusion

If this trend continues, we run the risk of missing the opportunity to build on the foundations we already have as Europe's number one contributor to open source software and a true centre of excellence, contributing up to £46.5bn pa to UK GDP.

4.0 Education, Education, Education

In my role as OpenUK's first Entrepreneur in Residence, one of the best ways I feel we can make a difference is through education. Education for founders now, education for government, and education for future founders.

4.1 Education for Future Founders now:

Many potential founders are lacking knowledge. This lack of knowledge encompasses many areas, but some of the consistent themes include:

- What business model to adopt around open technology and why
- How to find your first customers
- Community and employee relationships
- Sourcing the right skill sets and educating a team
- Who to turn to for investment
- How to build a successful product strategy

Although we're not going to be able to solve all of these areas, we can at least give potential founders more access to some of the knowledge I had. I would do this by building an open technology directory, and enabling access to a network of mentors. Initially, this knowledge base would encompass a list of:

- The companies building on, contributing to, or creating a business around open technology; and
- Key people who are leading open source strategy within those companies

As Entrepreneur in Residence I am personally committed to both publicising the programme, and speaking to each potential founder selected, working with them to match against a potential mentor based on their areas of need. That mentor would then introduce them to one other person in the network, and so on. This mentoring will, I hope, be a step toward helping to level the playing field for potential founders in the UK, giving them access to the knowledge they need, and connecting them to people who can help in distinct areas. This step and those that follow, should help to build stronger networks within the UK, and lead to better outcomes for Open Technology in the UK.

This is now in progress at OpenUK and an initial group of Future Founders will be offered mentoring in early 2022, starting alongside our free Future Founders training on 21 January.

The more people we can educate on open technology, the more future founders we will create, and if not founders, future employees. It's clear that young people in the UK want

to get into tech, seeing it as a fertile place to build a career and become successful. Yet, many are struggling to find avenues in order to do this. A number of the potential founders I spoke to warned of the reducing value in a typical degree, and a dearth of practical ways to learn how to code. Many of them got into it 'by accident' after picking up a raspberry pi, or being introduced to Github by a friend. There should be no reason anyone without a computer science background couldn't decide to change careers, quickly ramp up, and learn how to code.

Based on work already being developed by OpenUK, our Open Technology course for Future Founders, will be the first of its kind anywhere in the world, teaching practical, entrepreneurial skills from product development, business and revenue models and community interaction and collaboration, specific to Open Technology. The course will be run by our OpenUK Founders Forum and Legal Group, who are trail blazers in this space and will run over 10 weeks from 21 January 2022, on Fridays at noon.

Details will be provided at on the OpenUK website and anyone interested can participate at no cost.

The number of individuals able to benefit from mentorship will understandably be capped and applications for mentorship can submitted here.

The successful candidates will be selected by OpenUK's Entrepreneur in Residence and CEO. Those not chosen this year will be able to re-apply for future cohorts.

This course will be accompanied by a short test and will also be made available across a number of incubators in 2022.

A workshop will also be hosted for Future Founders alongside the mentoring programme.

4.2 Education for Government

We need to educate the Government on the benefits of Open Technology, and make sure that they lay the foundations to develop these new leaders.

OpenUK has taken already taken a lead with its three phase report in 2021. Phase one has quantified the UK's overall value contribution from open data, whilst phase two provides a breakdown of further analysis of the UK's adoption. These are already published and can be viewed at on the OpenUK webiste. Phase Three will look into value generated from adoption, including economic, skills, collaboration and sustainability. This will be shared in early December.

In 2022 OpenUK plans to share three further reports, one on each of Open Data, Open Source Software and Open Hardware in the UK.

OpenUK will also continue to build on the success of its first Open Technology for Sustainability Day, at COP26. Videos including Lord Maude's keynote and a variety of panels such as Open Collaboration, Opening the UK Energy Sector and Building a Sustainable Open Technology Community are shared.

It will work to evolve collective equity in Open Technology and to support development goals, benchmarking and metrics around the societal and economic values of Open Technology against sustainability. There will also be committed deliverables and a follow up event one year on, already in planning through 2022. This will be announced in detail in December 2021.

OpenUK is also happy to work with all and any parts of the UK and Devolved Governments in a collaborative effort, including the provision of workshops and in an advisory capacity.

4.3 Educating Future Generations of Open Technologists

We are at the very beginning of the digital revolution. An open technology will be an industry in which millions more people will be able to build long-lasting and successful careers. After seeing how technology can delight and inspire my own child, there is a huge opportunity to capture this interest with engaging content and programmes. The earlier we do this in people's lives the more our technical literacy will improve and can support the ability to fuel the future generation of Open Technologists.

In order to do this, OpenUK is building the curriculum for a range of skills development based on a single Open Technology Core:

Kids Course - two 10 lesson courses teaching, digital skills (coding in Make Code, Python and Javascript) open source software (based on the open source definition) and Sustainable Development Goals. This is offered along with 10 ezines including Open Source and Open Data with collaborative input from the Open Data Institute, and NASA. They also cover the important topic of sustainability, with a unique series of educational content on the meaning of sustainability.

This is all aligned with the UK Key Stage 3 Curriculum.

OpenUK Apprenticeship Knowledge Module and Certification - being built in 2022 and a GCSE or Scottish Higher are also being explored.

Publication of Open Source Software, Law Policy and Practise, Second Edition, Edited by Amanda Brock, OpenUK CEO, to be published in spring 2022 by Oxford University Press and with open access paid for by the Vietsch Foundation. This text will offer a free base curriculum for tertiary education and OpenUK is working with a number of universities to evolve modules for legal & governance, business, and engineering - as well as using some of the content generated from the Future Founders Training.

5. Metrics of Success:

Finally, we need to find a way to accurately measure the impact of the work we are doing. I propose creating an OpenUK dashboard that will give a sense as to how people in the OpenUK ecosystem are performing against key metrics - both from an economic and technological point of view.

Possible economic outcomes could include:

- Seed and angel 'pipeline' for Open Tech investments
- Participation rate in Series A from UK investors
- Number of $$ entering UK in open tech (grant or investment)
- Number of follow on rounds
- Number of hires in Open Technology
- Number of companies making more than $10m in ARR from UK
- Number of people in UK contributing to open source development or working for open source companies
- Number of Github, Gitlab etc contributors in the UK
- Number of children going through the courses above

These will be reviewed and worked on in the Spring of 2022 and will impact OpenUK's 2022 reporting. In addition we will be working with our Chief Sustainability Officer and Sustainability Advisory to created societal impact measures.

About OpenUK

OpenUK is the organisation for the business of Open Technology in the UK, being open source software, open source hardware and open data. As an industry organisation, OpenUK gives its participants greater influence than they could ever achieve alone. Open UK's purpose is to promote UK leadership and global collaboration in Open Technology.

OpenUK is committed to promoting UK leadership in Open Technology and supporting collaboration between businesses, public sector organisations, government and communities to expand the opportunities available to all around Open Technology on a global basis. OpenUK creates a visible Open Technology community in the UK, and uses that community's impact to ensure that the UK's laws and policies work for Open Technology whilst encouraging the future community in the business of Open Technology through learning.

OpenUK is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee, company number 11209475 with its registered office at 75 Kenton Street, St Pancras, London WC1N 1NN, www.openuk.uk, contact admin@openuk.uk

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