Case study: Jetstack
State of Open: The UK in 2023
Phase Two "Show us the Money"
Part 1: "The Economics of Open Source Software"

Matt Barker, Co-Founder

Matt Barker co-founded Jetstack in 2015, a London based cloud native technology services company specialising in Open Source Kubernetes software. Recognised for creating Cert Manager, a key tool for managing X.509 certificates in Kubernetes, Jetstack prioritises Open Source and a people-first approach. Barker, a longtime advocate for Open Source, emphasises the significance of community contributions and innovation. The company started with minimal capital and a small team, growing to around 30 permanent staff before being acquired by Venafi. Barker values the UK's diverse engineering talent pool and highlights the company's focus on understanding Kubernetes challenges. Jetstack's notable achievement includes donating the cert-manager project to the Cloud Native Compute Foundation, solidifying its central role in the ecosystem.
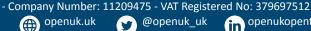
Matt Barker co-founded Jetstack which is headquartered in London, in 2015. Jetstack is an established cloud native technology services company helping enterprises build platform infrastructure using Open Source Kubernetes software. It is probably best known for being behind Cert Manager11, the de facto way of managing X.509 certificates in Kubernetes.

Ahead of the Game

Matt has been a loyal supporter of Open Source Software since the beginning of his professional career in Canonical and worked in this area long before its widespread popularity – he was keen to be a part of an industry he identified as "a growing future movement."

He felt that the Open Source ecosystem was not merely about technical know-how, but more about a way of life that became, for him, a strong personal identifier.

He was certain that Open Source Software 'had the potential to do amazing things for businesses.'

A People-first Approach

Jetstack started with £1000 and a couple of engineers. By the time Jetstack was sold three years ago, there were around 30 permanent staff members and an additional number of contractors. Matt emphasised that the majority of the team is intact and is now integrating itself into the buyer, Venafi.

He strongly believes that "our people are our business model." Primarily because the company is based on Open Source solutions and relies on community contributions, creativity, innovation and flexibility to grow their offerings and team. Joining Venafi has meant they are able to share this expertise with a large, global customer base and also use their knowledge to help build out product features that benefit both proprietary on-premises, and Open Source, cloud environments.

Made in the UK

Almost a decade ago, primarily through his interactions with UK-based VCs, Matt felt that there was ample capital for tech investments in the UK, but there was a lack of knowledge regarding tech companies built and reliant on Open Source Software.

He notes, "I didn't feel that many people in the UK knew enough about Open Source so it was a risk for me to take money from one of these companies and be forced to change my overall organisational vision of creating value-add Open Source solutions. I couldn't find investors that really understood what I was doing."

What he could find in the UK however was top class talent, incredible inventors, innovators and adept technical engineers. The UK has a wider range of engineering talent and expertise than almost anywhere. "There is a good pool of engineers in the UK. Even if they don't know about the particular technology, they are adaptable and open minded enough that you can easily train them. Some of our best team members have been people who we've taken on as graduates or as interns and they have grown to be outstanding."

Jetstack's goal was not solely to make a profit – it was to "start with a small team and work closely with customers to understand the challenges and problems around Kubernetes." This focus fits well in the UK with its longstanding focus on innovation, experimentation, technical curiosity, autonomy and freedom in open source – as Matt says, "that was our vibe."

One of the highlights of the Jetstack journey was the donation of the cert-manager project to the Cloud Native Compute Foundation. Cert-manager had reached thousands of stars on Github, and was being downloaded over a million times a day. This donation solidified the project at the heart of the ecosystem and was a worthy outcome of the work of the team.

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