

# Chapter XVII

## Open Source Web Portals

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### ABSTRACT

*Open source software is required to be widely available to the user community. To help developers fulfill this requirement, Web portals provide a way to make open source projects public so that the user community has access to their source code, can contribute to their development, and can interact with the developer team. However, choosing a Web portal is not an easy task. There are several options available, each of them offering a set of tools and features to its users. The goal of this chapter is to analyze a set of existing Web portals (SourceForge.net, Apache, Tigris, ObjectWeb, and Savannah) in the hopes that this will help users to choose a hosting site for their projects.*

### INTRODUCTION

One of the main sustaining pillars of the open source (Perens, 1997) philosophy is that software must be widely available to the user community. In order to mature, open source projects need collaboration from the user community, and this is hard to achieve just by publishing a project on a developer's personal home page. An efficient way of reaching these requirements of availability and collaboration is by hosting the software on an open source Web portal. There are several

portals that address these requirements, offering free hosting to open source projects.

Besides giving access to a project's source code, these portals also offer tools to help the development of the projects they host. Among such tools, we can cite task management tools, issue trackers, forums, mailing lists, tools to support feature requests, and version control servers.

The different portals offer different advantages to the projects they host. It is difficult for a developer who is not used to contributing to open source projects to choose the one that best

fits his or her needs. This is because there are many portal features that are only visible to those who actively contribute to an open source project. Additionally, a portal may have particular requirements that the developer must be aware of. For example, some portals require that the project be under the protection of a specific open source license. The goal of this chapter is to help such users in choosing a portal to host their projects. We analyze five Web portals and compare them in terms of the services they offer. The analyzed portals are as follows:

- SourceForge.Net (Open Source Technology Group, 2005),
- Apache (Apache Software Foundation, 1999)
- Tigris (Tigris, 2005)
- ObjectWeb (Object Web Consortium, 2005)
- Savannah (Free Software Foundation, 2000b)

They were chosen for several reasons. First, they host projects for free. Second, they are general in the sense that they host general free or open source software (Savannah hosts even nonsoftware projects). Third, they have been online for enough time for one to assume that they probably will not disappear and leave users helpless.

It is important to emphasize that this kind of analysis is new in literature. To the best of our knowledge, there is no work in the literature that provides similar analysis (DiBona, Stone, & Cooper, 2005).

It is also important to state that some of the portals may be focused on free software (Free Software Foundation, 1996) while others focus on open source software (Perens, 1997). Although their way of looking at the world is different (Stallman, 2002), the philosophies are similar. In this chapter, we do not intend to make any distinction between them. Thus, we use the term FOSS (free

and open source software) as synonymous of free software and open source software.

The subsequent section describes briefly the way most Web portals work. Then we discuss the methodology of our study and the features of each portal. Next we discuss future trends and conclude with a tabular comparison of the Web portals.

## BACKGROUND: HOSTING SOFTWARE ON WEB PORTALS

In this section, we describe how portals work in essence, hoping this will give readers a better understanding of our proposal in this chapter.

Web portals dedicated to hosting software projects are basically Web pages that offer a set of functionalities to its users. Usually, the entrance page explains the purpose of the portal and provides links to documentation, instructions to users who want to host a project, a news section, and links to the hosted projects. Such links are usually presented within categories. Figure 1 shows a cut of the main page of the SourceForge.Net portal. Notice the news section and the links to software categories (at the bottom of the figure). Such categories link to hosted projects classified under them.

Each hosted project has its own page within the portal with a URL (uniform resource locator) similar to `http://www.portal.org/project`, where *portal* is the portal name, and *project* is the project name. It is through this page that the portal provides tools and services to developers. Also, such pages play the role of advertising the project. Users will find projects they may be interested in through such pages.

The main page of a project within any portal has basic information about the project, news, and a list of links to source-code downloads and mailing lists, among other features. As we will discuss later on, it is a choice of the project's administrator what will appear on the main page.

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