

# How to tell if a FLOSS project is doomed to FAIL

(This was originally written by [Tom 'spot' Callaway](http://fedoraproject.org/wiki/User:Spot)<sup>1</sup> and is used here under the [CC BY SA 3.0](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)<sup>2</sup> license. The work [How you know your Free or Open Source Software Project is doomed to FAIL \(or at least, held back from success\)](http://spot.livejournal.com/308370.html)<sup>3</sup> originally appeared at this URL:)

<http://spot.livejournal.com/308370.html>

This was inspired by my recent efforts to look at [Chromium](http://code.google.com/chromium/)<sup>4</sup>, but these are just some of the red flags I generally have observed over the years written down.

## Size

- The source code is more than 100 MB. [ +5 points of FAIL ]
- If the source code also exceeds 100 MB when it is compressed [ +5 points of FAIL ]

## Source Control

- There is no publicly available source control (e.g. cvs, svn, bzr, git) [ +10 points of FAIL ]
- There is publicly available source control, but:
  - There is no web viewer for it [ +5 points of FAIL ]
  - There is no documentation on how to use it for new users [ +5 points of FAIL ]
- You've written your own source control for this code [ +30 points of FAIL ]
- You don't actually use the existing source control [ +50 points of FAIL ]

## Building From Source

- There is no documentation on how to build from source [ +20 points of FAIL ]
- If documentation exists on how to build from source, but it doesn't work [ +10 points of FAIL ]
- Your source is configured with a handwritten shell script [ +10 points of FAIL ]
- Your source is configured editing flat text config files [ +20 points of FAIL ]
- Your source is configured by editing code header files manually [ +30 points of FAIL ]
- Your source isn't configurable [ +50 points of FAIL ]
- Your source builds using something that isn't GNU Make [ +10 points of FAIL ]
- Your source only builds with third-party proprietary build tools [ +50 points of FAIL ]

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<sup>1</sup> <http://fedoraproject.org/wiki/User:Spot>

<sup>2</sup> <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://spot.livejournal.com/308370.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://code.google.com/chromium/>

- You've written your own build tool for this code [ +100 points of FAIL ]

### Bundling

- Your source only comes with other code projects that it depends on [ +20 points of FAIL ]
- If your source code cannot be built without first building the bundled code bits [ +10 points of FAIL ]
- If you have modified those other bundled code bits [ +40 points of FAIL ]

### Libraries

- Your code only builds static libraries [ +20 points of FAIL ]
- Your code can build shared libraries, but only unversioned ones [ +20 points of FAIL ]
- Your source does not try to use system libraries if present [ +20 points of FAIL ]

### System Install

- Your code tries to install into /opt or /usr/local [ +10 points of FAIL ]
- Your code has no "make install" [ +20 points of FAIL ]
- Your code doesn't work outside of the source directory [ +30 points of FAIL ]

### Code Oddities

- Your code uses Windows line breaks ("DOS format" files) [ +5 points of FAIL ]
- Your code depends on specific compiler feature functionality [ +20 points of FAIL ]
- Your code depends on specific compiler bugs [ +50 points of FAIL ]
- Your code depends on Microsoft Visual Anything [ +100 points of FAIL ]

### Communication

- Your project does not announce releases on a mailing list [ +5 points of FAIL ]
- Your project does not have a mailing list [ +10 points of FAIL ]
- Your project does not have a bug tracker [ +20 points of FAIL ]
- Your project does not have a website [ +50 points of FAIL ]
- Your project is sourceforge vaporware [ +100 points of FAIL ]

### Releases

- Your project does not do sanely versioned releases (Major, Minor) [ +10 points of FAIL ]
- Your project does not do versioned releases [ +20 points of FAIL ]
- Your project does not do releases [ +50 points of FAIL ]
- Your project only does releases as attachments in web forum posts [ +100 points of FAIL ]

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- Your releases are only in .zip format [ +5 points of FAIL ]
  - Your releases are only in OSX .zip format [ +10 points of FAIL ]
  - Your releases are only in .rar format [ +20 points of FAIL ]
  - Your releases are only in .arj format [ +50 points of FAIL ]
  - Your releases are only in an encapsulation format that you invented. [ +100 points of FAIL ]
  - Your release does not unpack into a versioned top-level directory (e.g. glibc-2.4.2/ ) [ +10 points of FAIL ]
  - Your release does not unpack into a top-level directory (e.g. glibc/ ) [ +25 points of FAIL ]
  - Your release unpacks into an absurd number of directories (e.g. home/johndoe/glibc-svn/tarball/glibc/src/ ) [ +50 points of FAIL ]

#### History

- Your code is a fork of another project [ +10 points of FAIL ]
- Your primary developers were not involved with the parent project [ +50 points of FAIL ]
- Until open sourcing it, your code was proprietary for:
  - 1-2 years [ +10 points of FAIL ]
  - 3-5 years [ +20 points of FAIL ]
  - 6-10 years [ +30 points of FAIL ]
  - 10+ years [ +50 points of FAIL ]

#### Licensing

- Your code does not have per-file licensing [ +10 points of FAIL ]
- Your code contains inherent license incompatibilities [ +20 points of FAIL ]
- Your code does not have any notice of licensing intent [ +30 points of FAIL ]
- Your code doesn't include a copy of the license text [ +50 points of FAIL ]
- Your code doesn't have a license [ +100 points of FAIL ]

#### Documentation

- Your code doesn't have a changelog [ +10 points of FAIL ]
- Your code doesn't have any documentation [ +20 points of FAIL ]
- Your website doesn't have any documentation [ +30 points of FAIL ]

#### FAIL METER

- 0 points of FAIL: Perfect! All signs point to success!

## Chapter 12. How to tell if a FLOSS project is doomed to FAIL

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- 5-25 points of FAIL: You're probably doing okay, but you could be better.
- 30-60 points of FAIL: Babies cry when your code is downloaded
- 65-90 points of FAIL: Kittens die when your code is downloaded
- 95-130 points of FAIL: HONK HONK. THE FAILBOAT HAS ARRIVED!
- 135+ points of FAIL: So much fail, your code should have its own reality TV show.