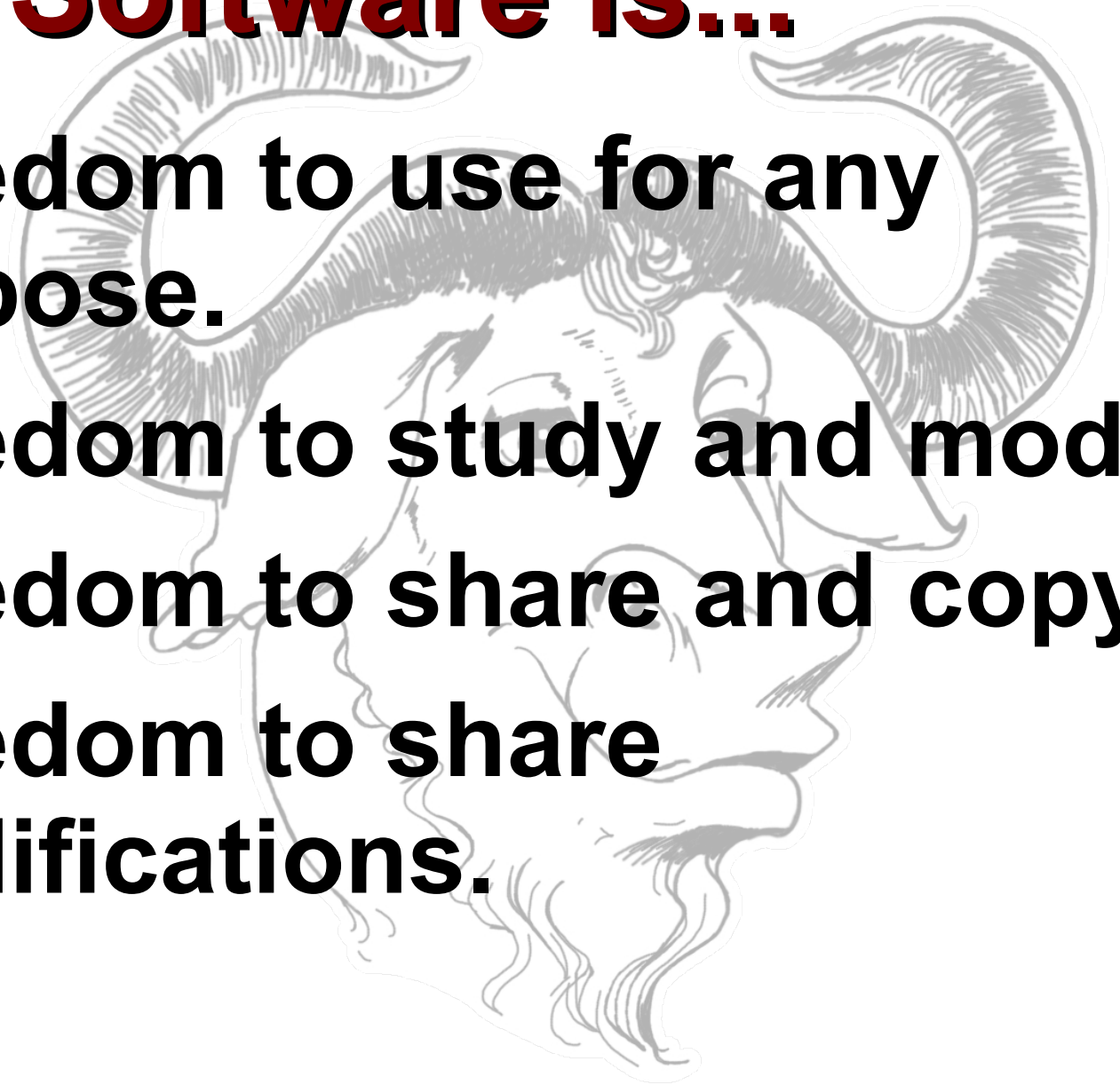
When Free Software Isn't Better

Why free software isn't always very good, why that's not a problem, and how we make it better.

Free Software is...

- Freedom to use for any purpose.
- Freedom to study and modify.
- Freedom to share and copy.
- Freedom to share modifications.



Open source is...

“Open source is a development method for software that harnesses the power of distributed peer review and transparency of process. The promise of open source is better quality, higher reliability, more flexibility, lower cost, and an end to predatory vendor lock-in.”

Open Source Initiative Mission Statement

Linus' Law

"Given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow."

More Formally

"Given a large enough beta-tester and co-developer base, almost every problem will be characterized quickly and the fix will be obvious to someone."

There's bad news...

“Open source” is often less featureful.

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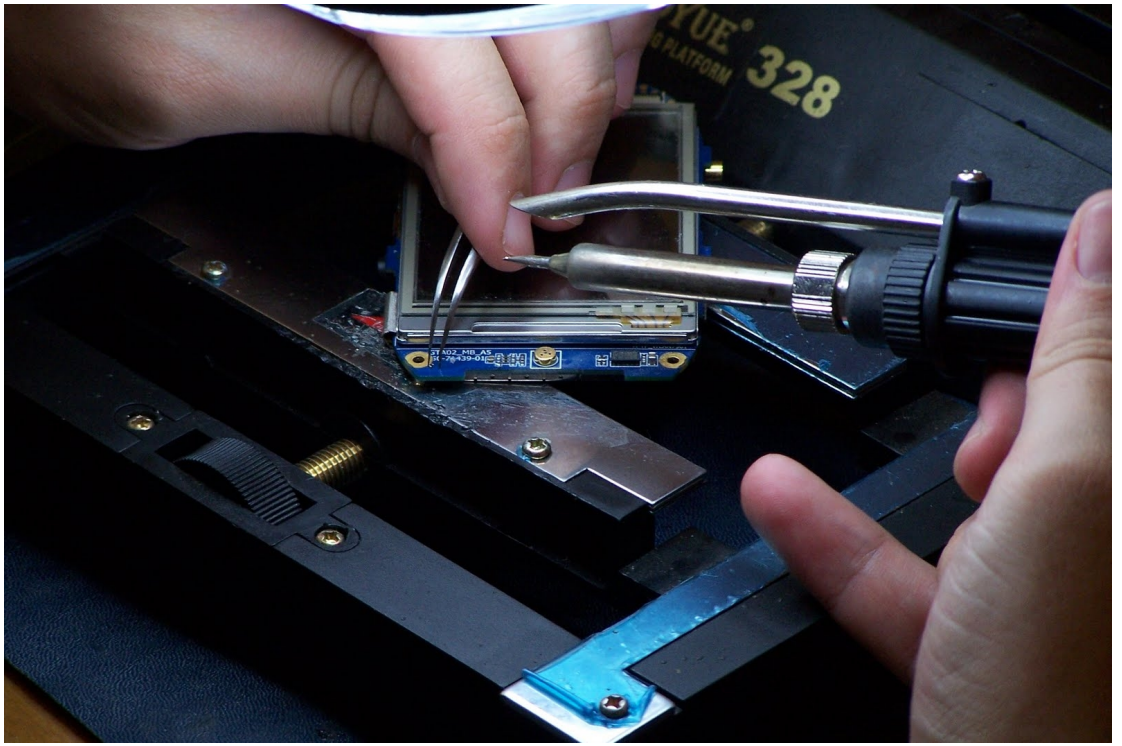
“Open source” is often low quality.



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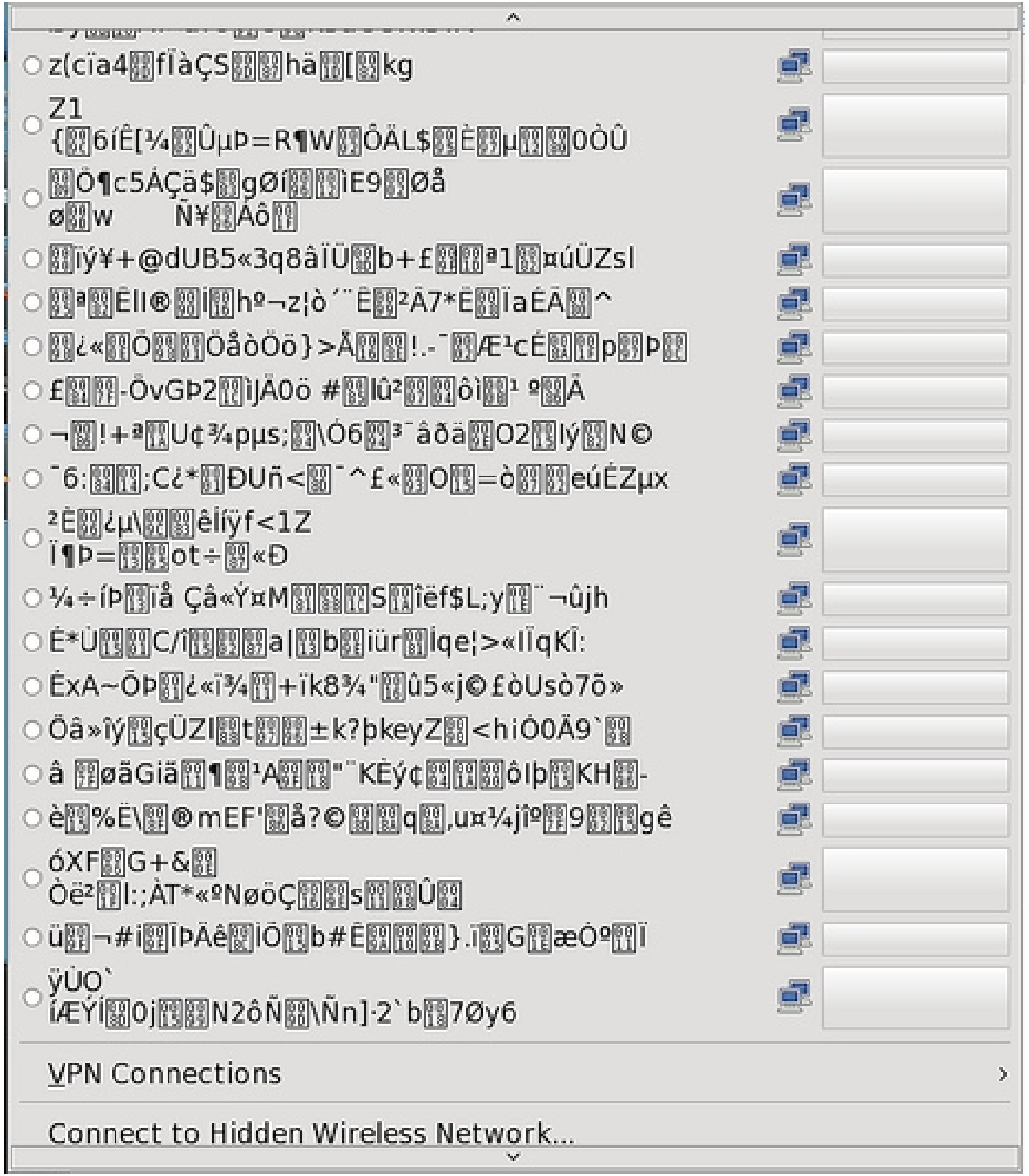

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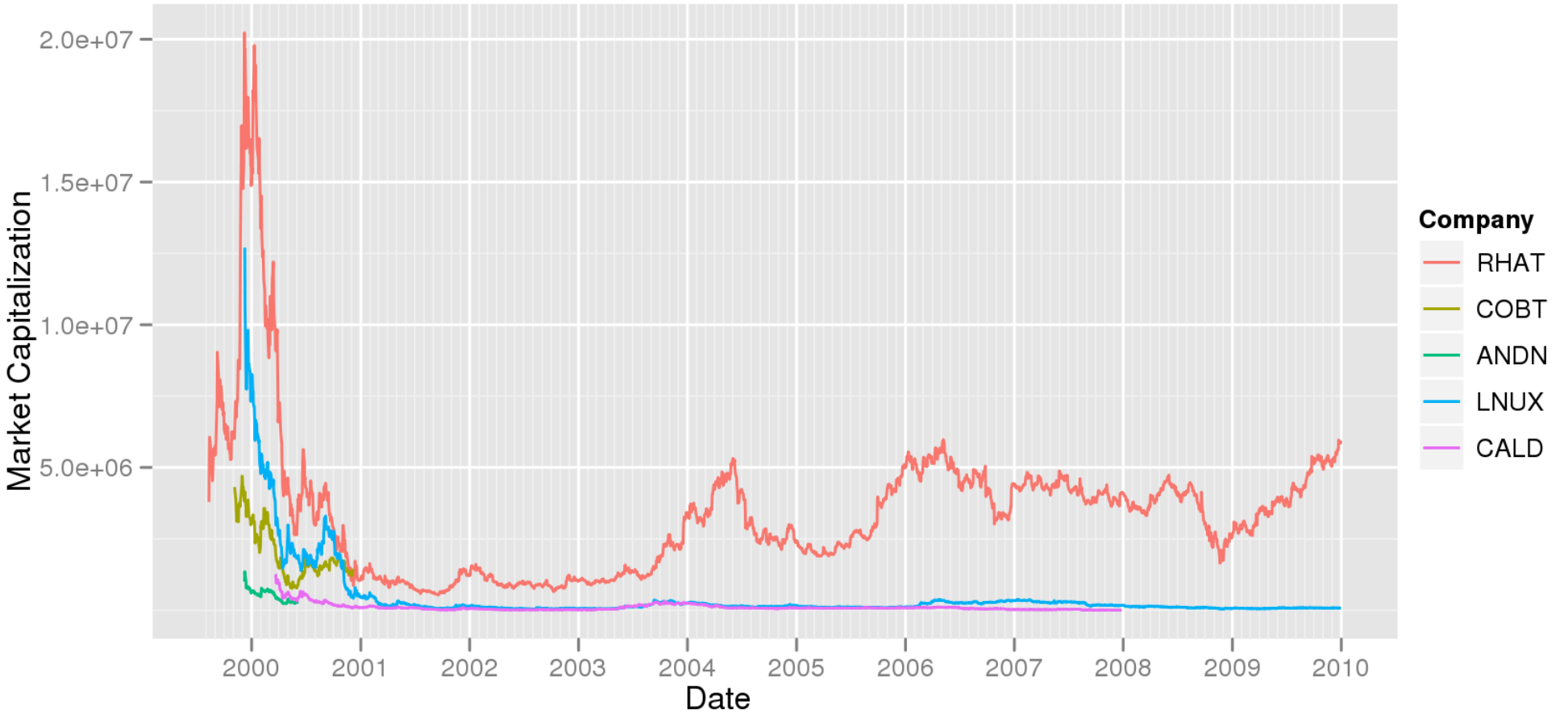
“Open source” often leads to bad business.



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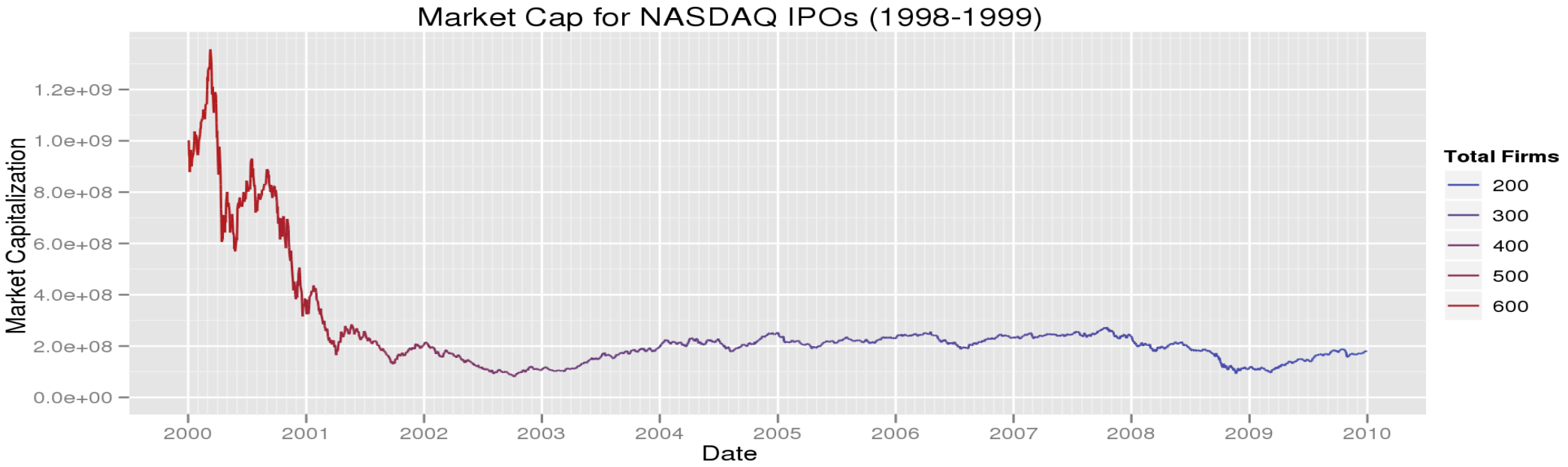
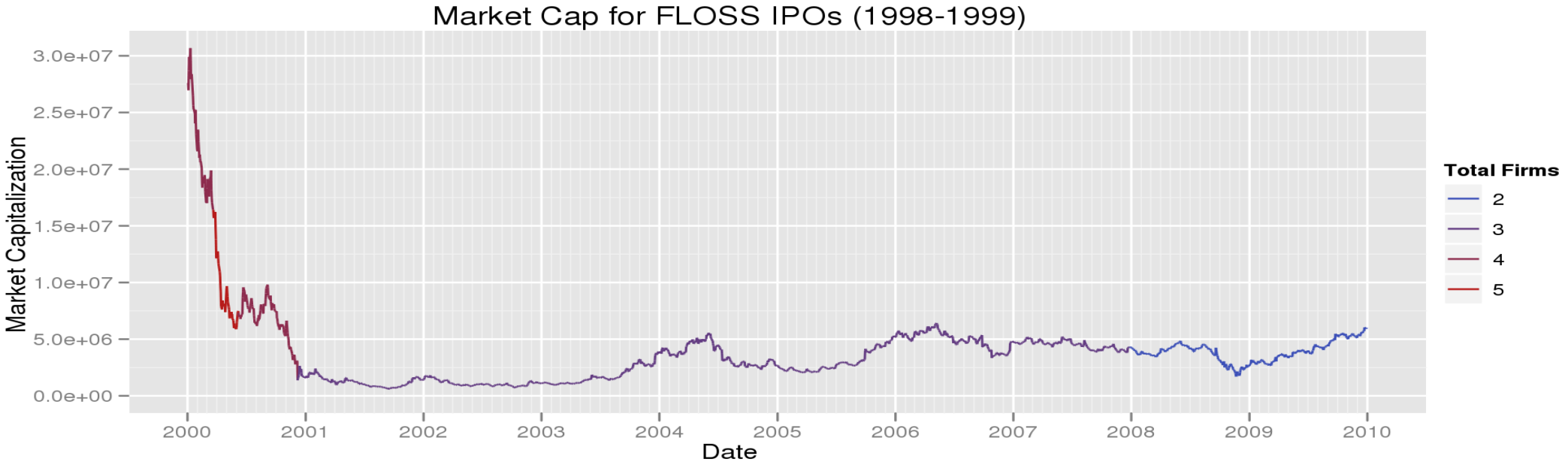
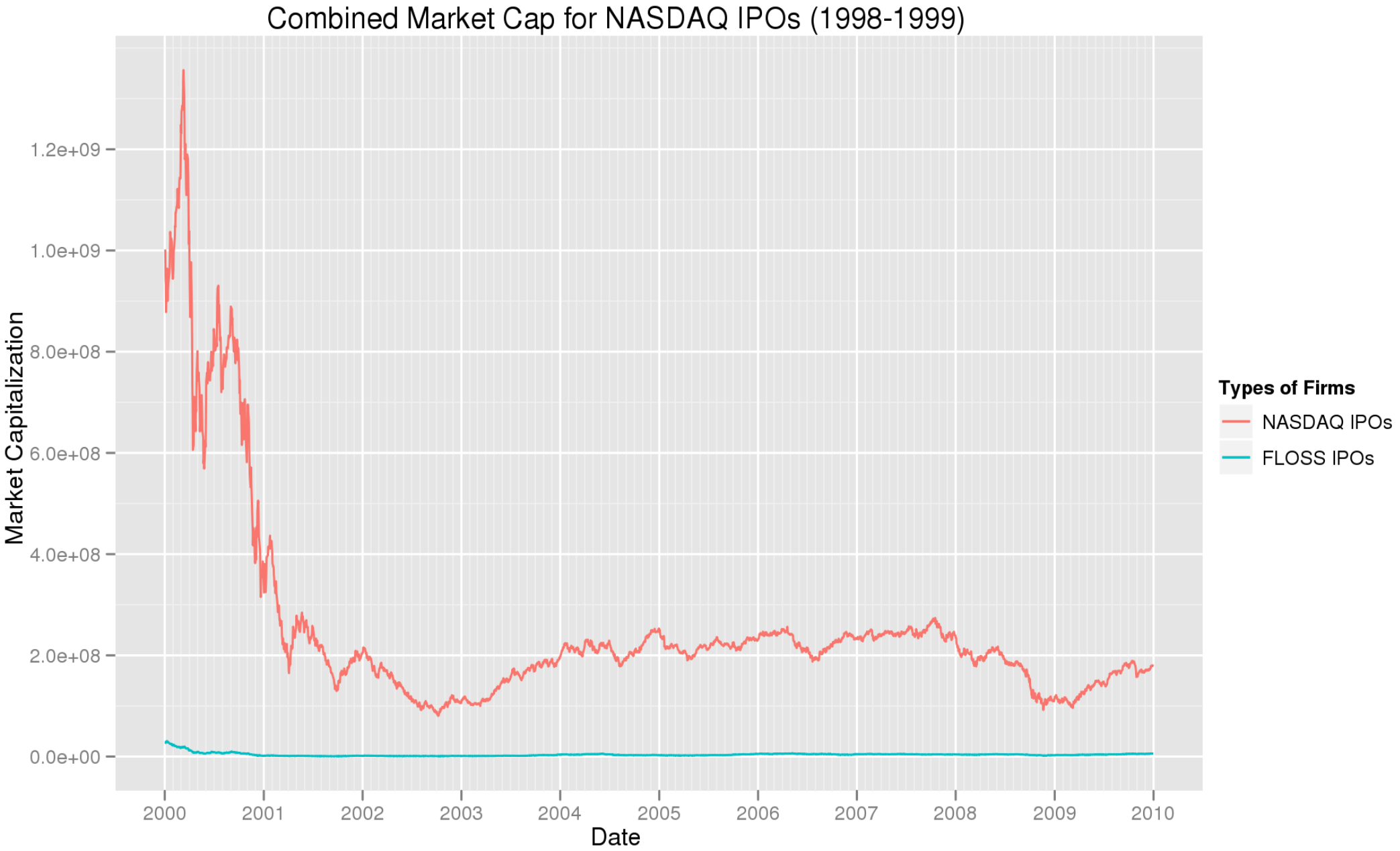
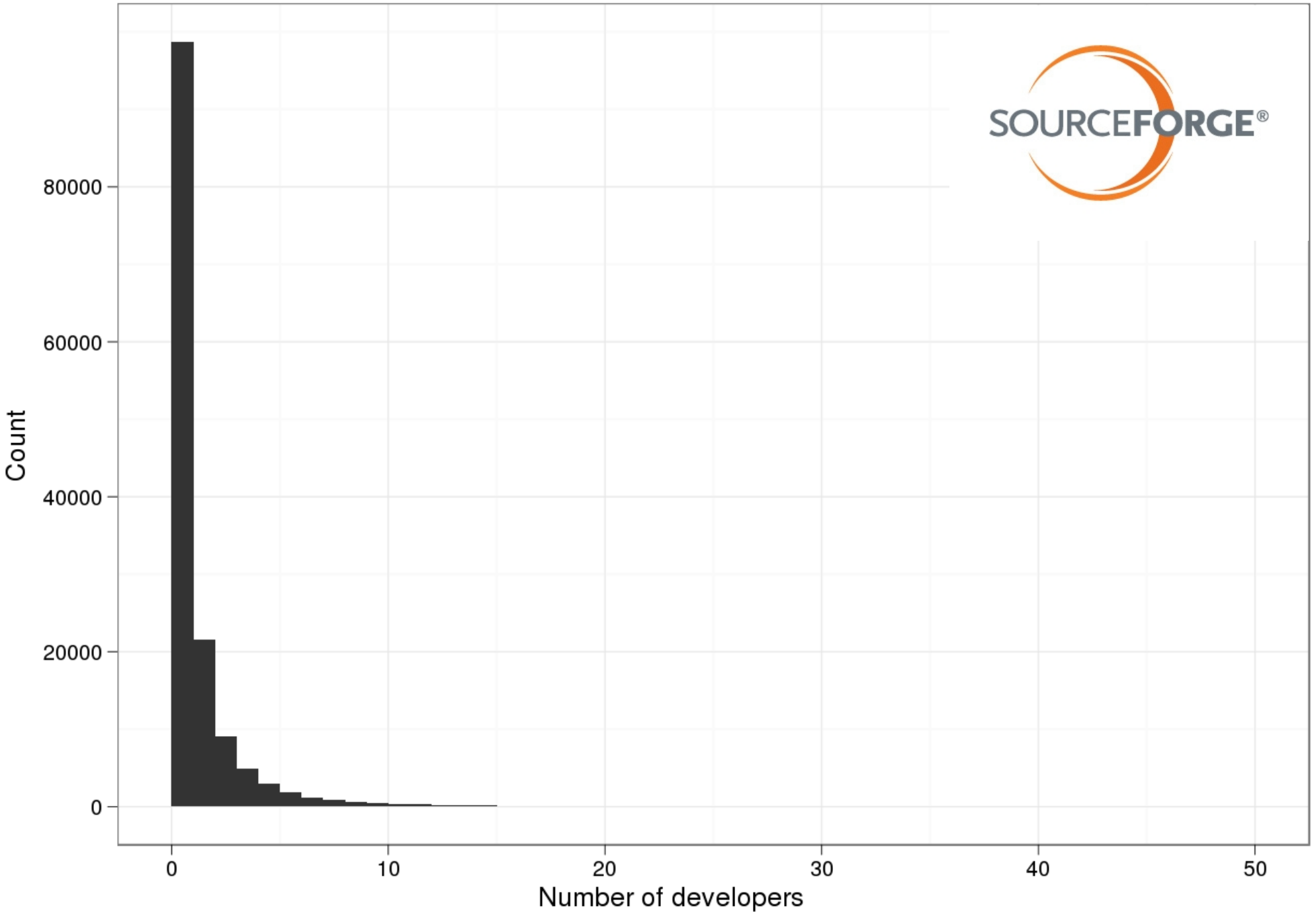

Market Cap for NASDAQ IPOs (1998-1999)
Market Capitalization
1.2e+09
1.0e+09
8.0e+08
6.0e+08
4.0e+08
2.0e+08
0.0e+00
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
Date
Total Firms
200
300
400
500
600


Market Cap for FLOSS IPOs (1998-1999)
Market Capitalization
3.0e+07
2.5e+07
2.0e+07
1.5e+07
1.0e+07
5.0e+06
0.0e+00
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
Date
Total Firms
2
3
4
5


Combined Market Cap for NASDAQ IPOs (1998-1999)
Market Capitalization
1.2e+09
1.0e+09
8.0e+08
6.0e+08
4.0e+08
2.0e+08
0.0e+00
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009
2010
Date
Types of Firms
NASDAQ IPOs
FLOSS IPOs

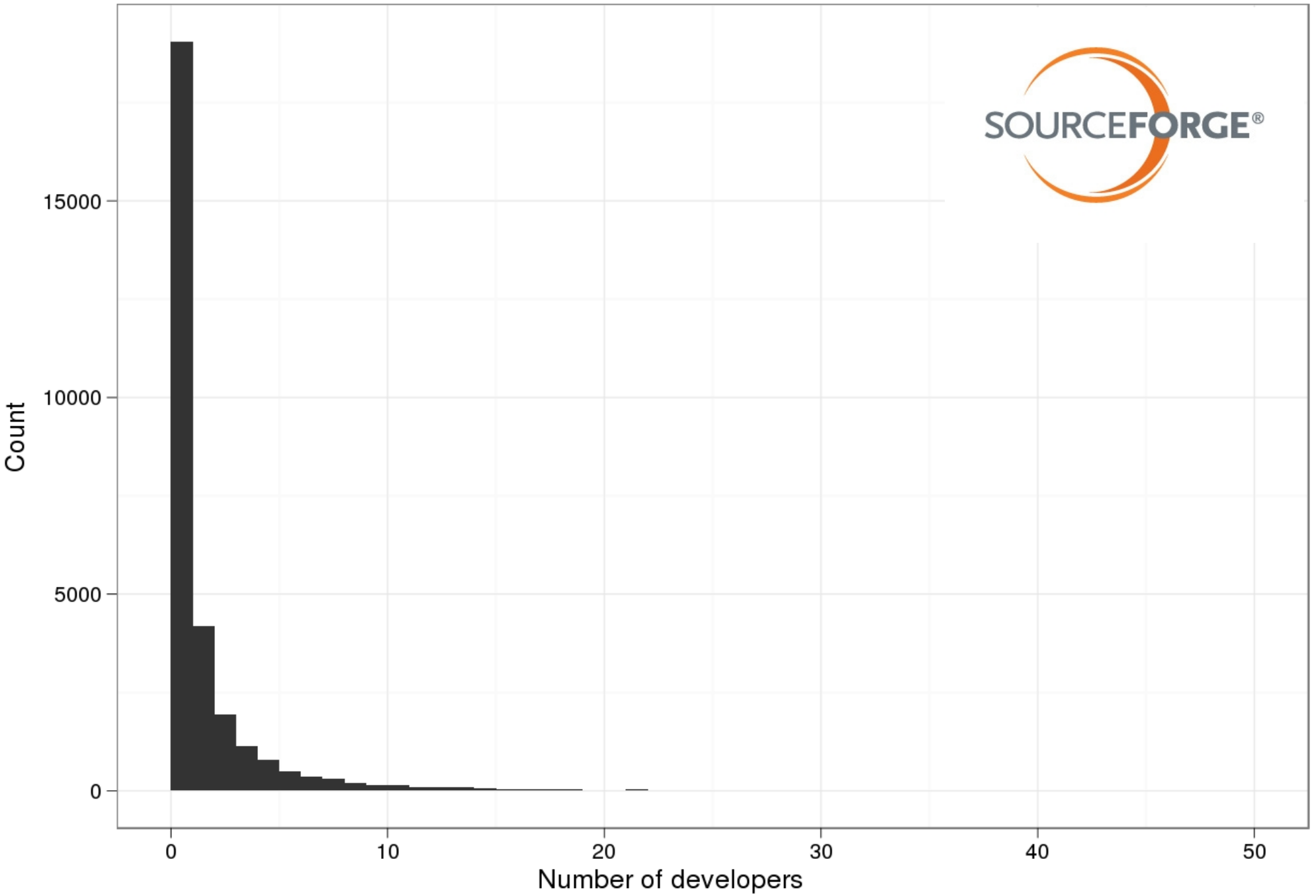
“Open source” is usually uncollaborative.

Publish Openly
Community Improves
Higher Quality
Profit!
Attract Community



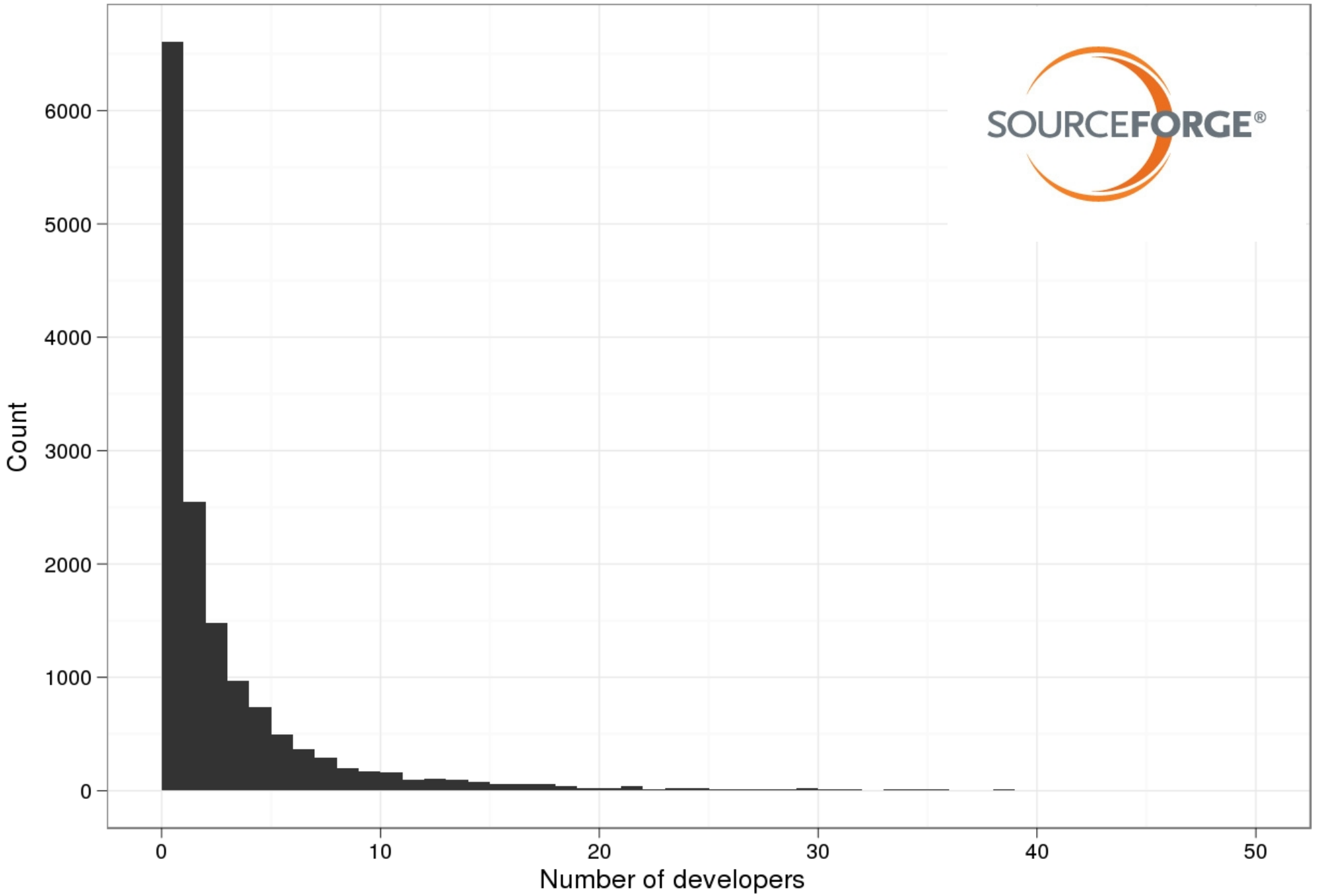
***All* SourceForge Projects (n=145,850)**

Median: 1



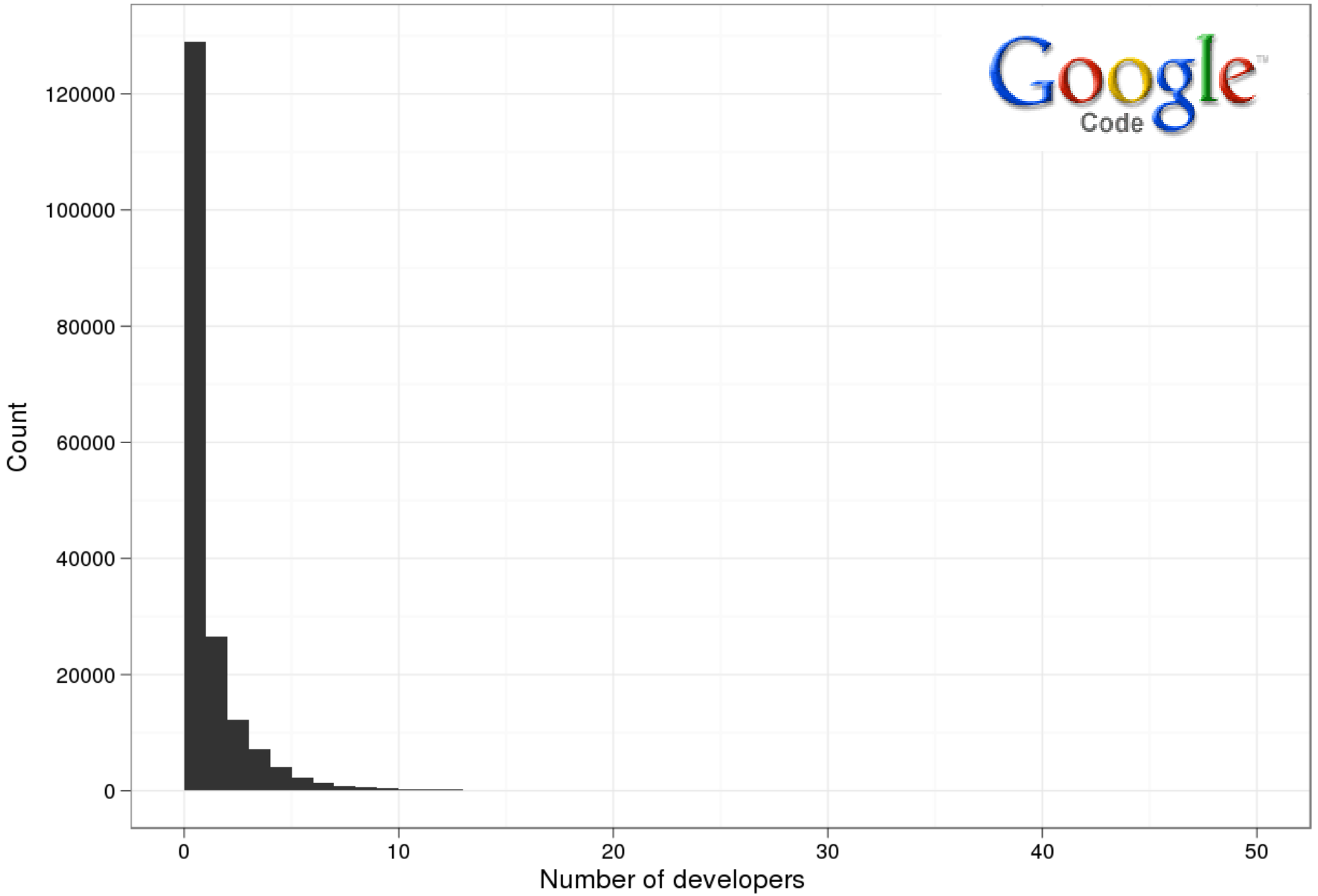
“Mature” and “Production” SourceForge Projects (n=29,821)

Median: 1



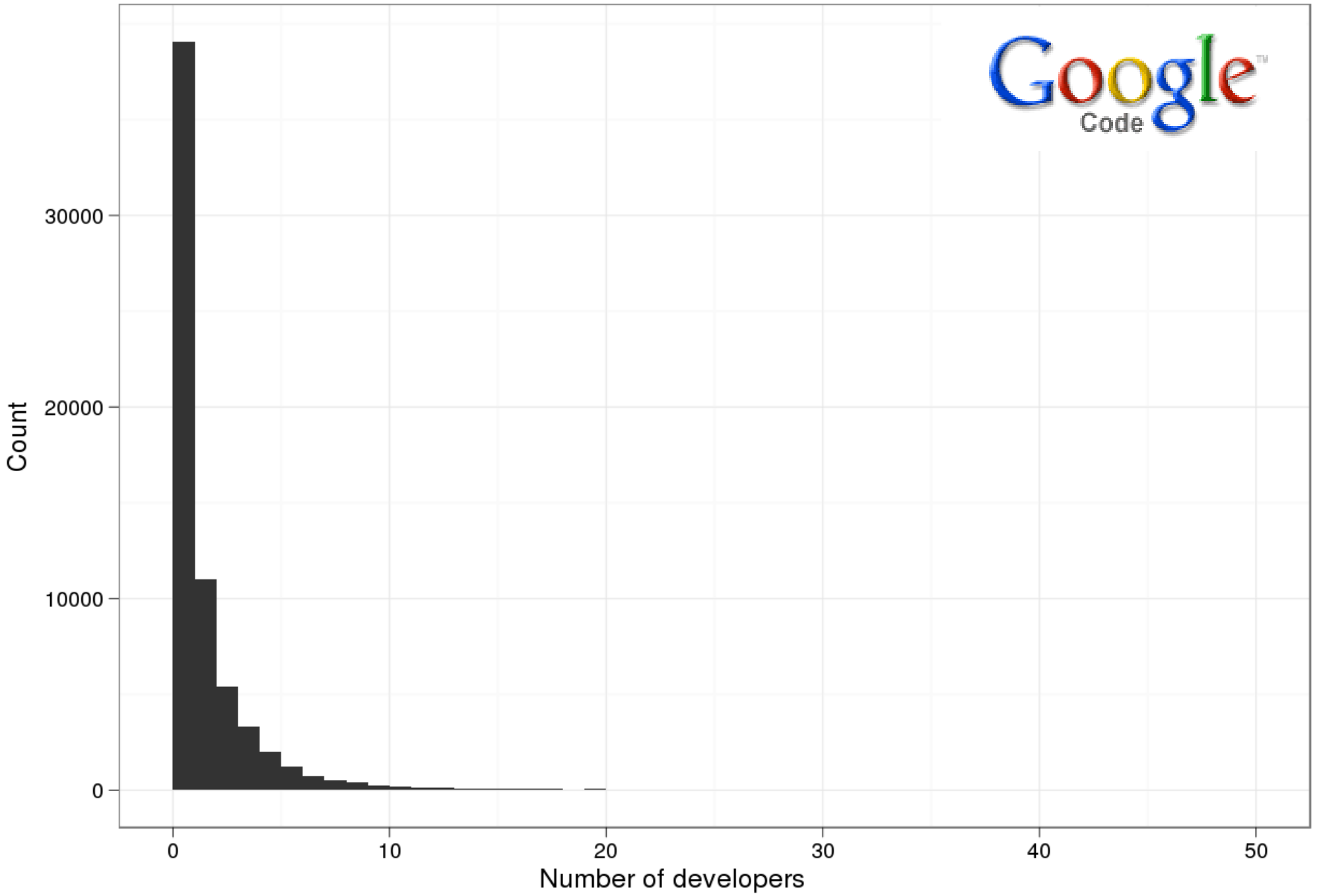
SourceForge Projects Downloaded >=99 times (90th percentile) (n=15,096)

Median: 2



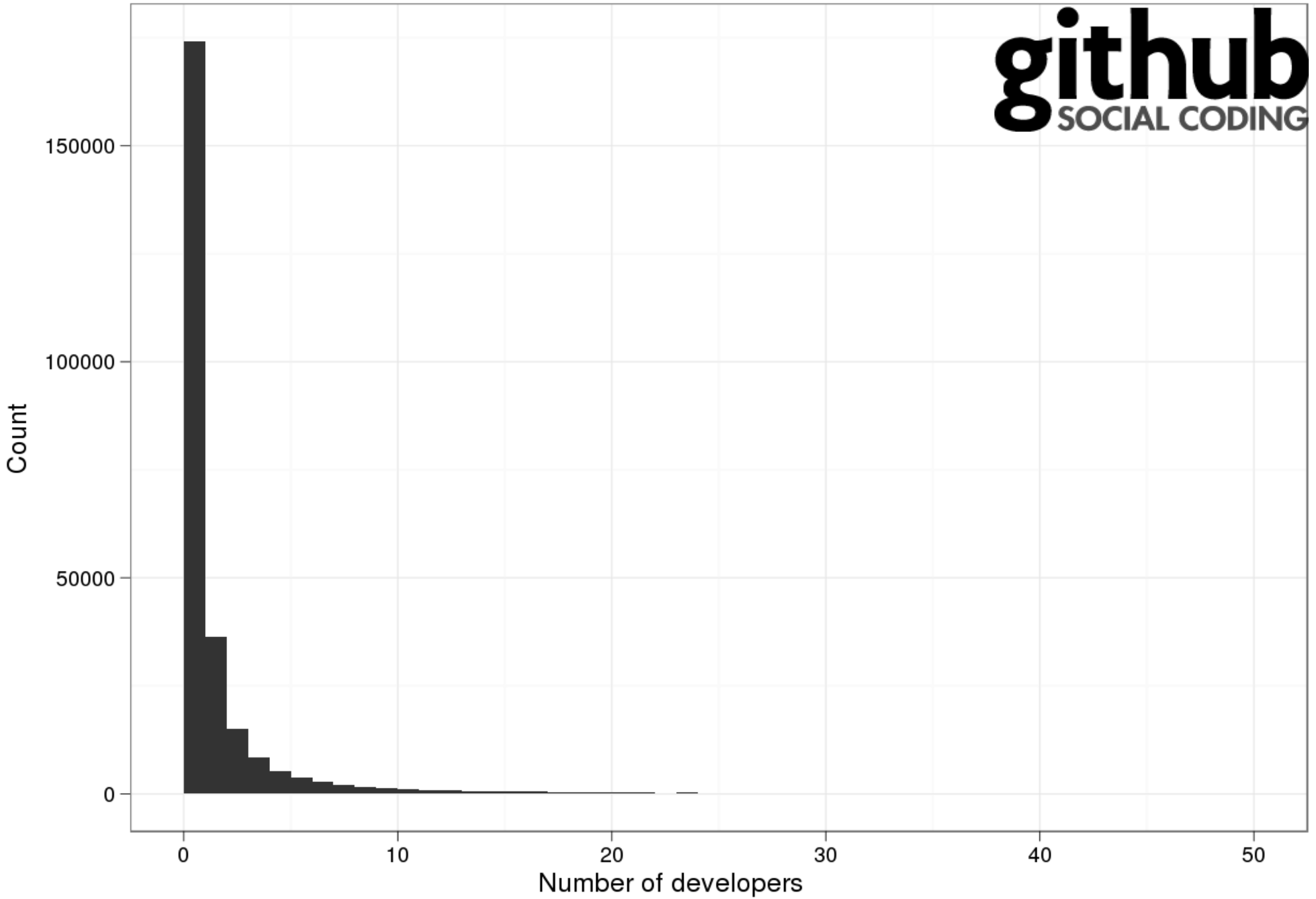
***All* Google Code Projects (n=195,834)**

Median: 1



Active Google Code Projects (n=74,398)

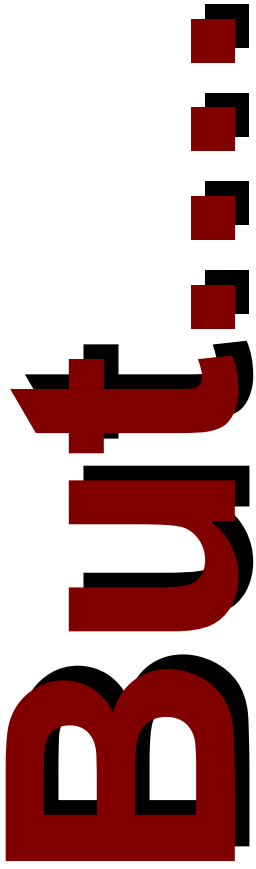
Median: 1



Github public projects (developers are “watchers”) (n=265,088)

Median: 1

So that's the bad news.


But...

Open Source vs. Free Software

Free software always gives users freedom.

Free Software is...

Aut my
C ol
Empo ment

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Free software is resistant to antifeatures.

Microsoft®
Copyright © 1985-1996
Microsoft Corporation
Microsoft®
Windows NT®
Workstation 4.0
with Microsoft Internet Explorer
This product is protected by US and international copyright laws as described in the About Box.

Windows 7 Starter (2GB)

Windows 7 Thin PC

Windows 7 Home Basic (8GB)

Windows 7 Home Premium (16GB)

Windows 7 Professional (192GB)

Windows 7 Enterprise (192GB)

Windows 7 Ultimate (192GB)

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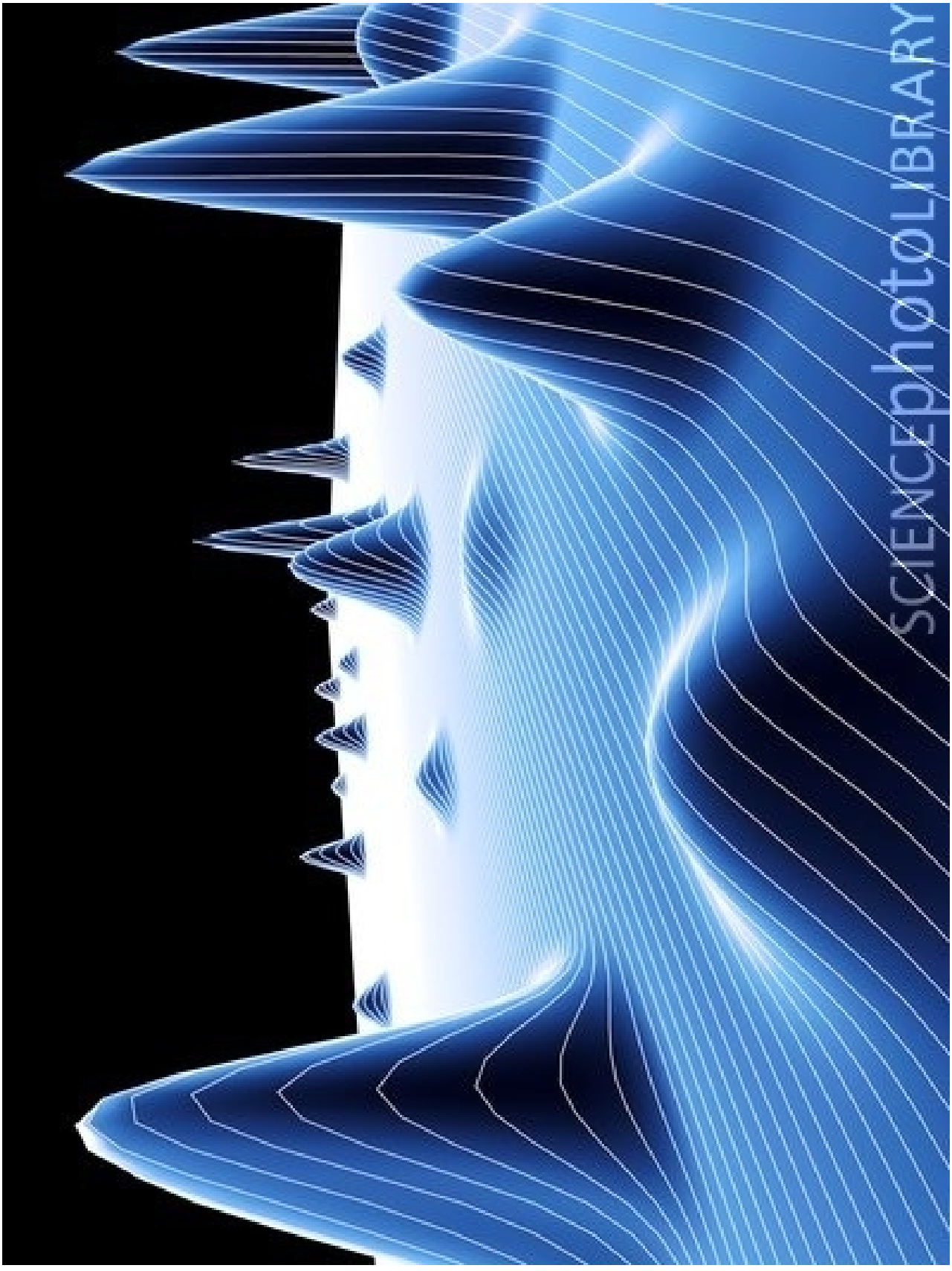
Free software makes failure cheap.

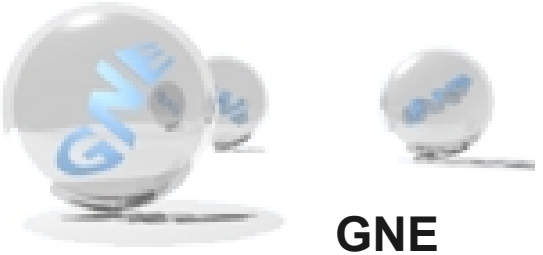

SCIENCEphotoLIBRARY

everything2

h2g2

NUPEDIA.COM
THE OPEN CONTENT ENCYCLOPEDIA

The Distributed Encyclopedia



GNE

TheInfoNetwork

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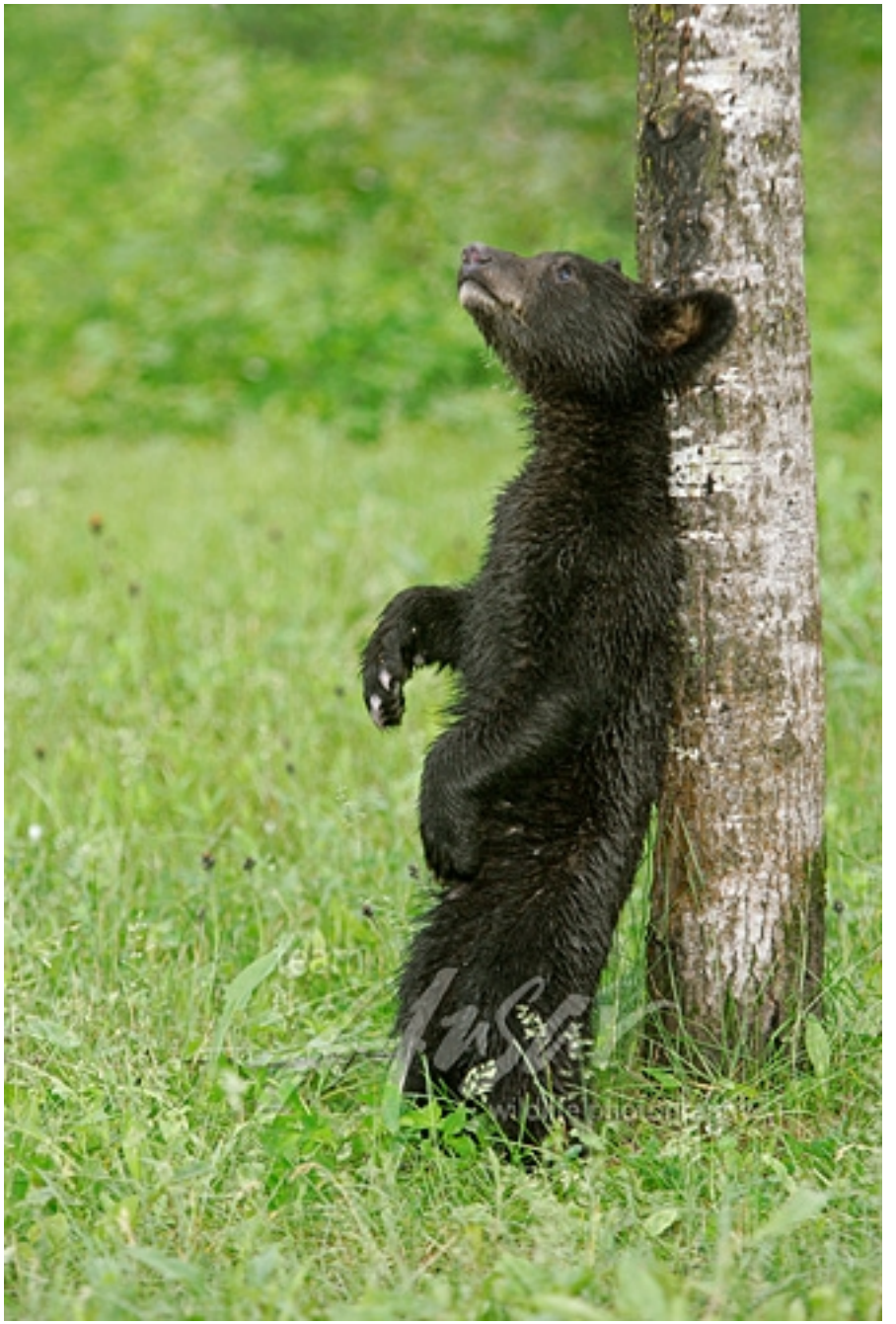
Free software makes success cheap.

Many developers are...

Scratching their own itch.



HAIKU

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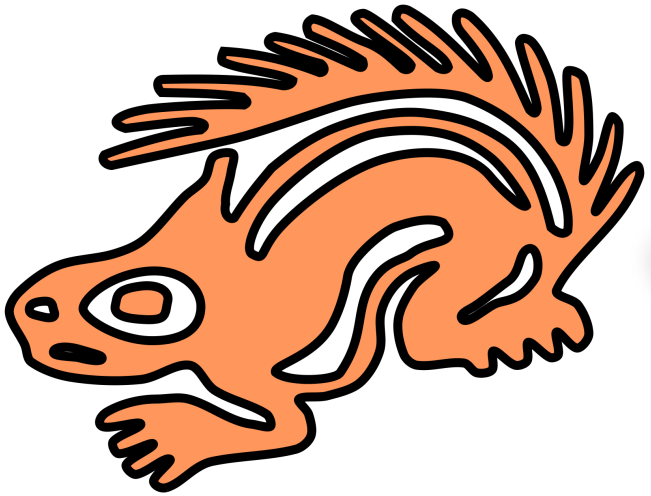
Open Source Initiative Mission Statement

open source™

GNOME Gill



Sodipodi

Inkscape

Free software can lead to massive collaboration.

Thanks!

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http://mako.cc