

## An Up-to-date Overview of Free Software and its Makers

# Projects on the Move

In this month's column we will congratulate the Debian Project on its tenth birthday and looking into the history of the project, Debconf 3 and Debian mentors.

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Let's take this opportunity to say something really important: Happy Birthday, Debian. The official founding date of the Debian GNU/Linux Project is August 16 1993. So this year sees the tenth birthday of one of the largest free software projects – and that is more than enough reason for developers and users all over the world to throw parties [2].

Debian's history is unique. In 1993 Ian Murdock launched a project aimed at creating a completely free Linux distribution. It did not take Ian long to find a name for the newly founded project; he simply put his own and his wife Debra's name together. Originally, Ian was



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responsible for the releases himself, although there was some assistance from developers even at this early stage. In January 1994 he released Version 0.91; this version was the first to offer a kind of package system and was also the final “Ian Murdock only” release.

The next official version was not released until March 1995. Developers had been working for over a year on

reworking Debian's internal design. Their aim was to allow external developers to contribute to the project and thus promote the development of Debian.

### The First Package System

Ian Jackson was mainly responsible for this. He took over the development of DPKG, the first package system for Debian, which supported basic functions such as package dependencies. Debian moved out of the realms of x86 with Version 0.93R5 with Hartmut Koptein porting a large number packages to the Motorola M68k processor architecture. Hartmut was also responsible for the PowerPC port, where he co-operated with Martin Schulze and Vincent Renardias.

By the time Debian 0.93R6 was released in November 1995 the project had grown to some 60 developers. Shortly afterward, in March 1996, Ian Murdock left the project for career reasons. His successor as Debian Project Leader (DPL) was Bruce Perens. Bruce was responsible for developing one of the project's most important policies, the Debian Free Software Guidelines and the Social Contract [1].

Perens was also the driving force behind the foundation of “Software



Figure 1: It is Debian's 10th birthday this year. Debian is one of the oldest and biggest Linux distributions

in the Public Interest, Inc” (SPI for short) in June 1997. SPI was originally intended to manage sponsored funding for the Debian Project but has now become a central coordinating body for many free projects in need of financial assistance.

The first official election of the DPL took place in 1999 with Wichert Akkerman taking the majority of votes. His term of office saw the release of one of the most important versions from the end user’s point of view: Debian GNU/Linux 2.1, alias Slink, was the first version to use Apt, which had been developed as a front-end for DPKG. Apt is extremely popular today – as can be seen by ports to compliment the RPM package system.

As I write this article, the latest major milestones is Debian 3.0, alias Woody, which was released in 2002: It supports eleven different computer architectures and comprises over 9000 software packages, which are maintained by over 1000 developers. Debian 3.1 (alias Sarge) is set to be another milestone, and includes



**Figure 2: Ian Murdock, the father of the Debian Project. Ian is also a co-founder of Linux International, SPI, and the Open Source Initiative**

a Debian installer that can do without the antiquated boot floppy system.

## Party On

But before that happens, Debian is having a birthday party. Six events have been announced in the US – although in some cases there are no exact plans as regards the venue or date – but sadly only one so far in the UK. Debian developer Martin Schulze

announced that he would like to organize a party somewhere in central Germany. He is planning a barbecue and breakfast the next morning. If you are interested in attending any one of these events, refer to [2] and [3] for more information.

## Debconf Take Three

Before the celebrations started, developers met on July 20 in Oslo, Norway, to take part in what is now the third annual Debconf (Debian Conference). This is the largest get-together of the Debian developer community. The Debcamp took place a week beforehand and was the venue for a number of inter-

esting workshops and hands-on hacking sessions.

This year’s topics were the Debian Installer, automatic network configuration, and a common infrastructure for meta-distributions like Knoppix or FAI. Debian NP is involved with building sub-distributions for non-profit organizations. At the Debconf proper there were keynotes on HP and Debian, the work in progress on FTP Masters and Debian security.

## Debian Mentors: More Packages

More packages are needed to make Debian more popular. However, you need to be an official Debian developer to upload packages to the FTP archive. If you develop Debian packages, but are not an official developer, you cannot upload your packages to the FTP server. But now there is a plan to resolve this issue: Ivo Marino had the idea of launching a project called Debian Mentors, which would provide webspace for unofficial Debian developers to upload their packages without incurring any costs. The team has now grown to four people.

There are no special requirements for using the Debian Mentors service. The service is suitable to anyone who has created a Debian package, and would like to place it at the disposal of as many users as possible. Detailed information on registering and using the service is available from [4].

## That’s all folks!

...for this month at least, but I do have one request before I go: If you can recommend a program that you would like to see featured in *Projects on the Move*, why not mail me your suggestion? I look forward to your comments!

**Figure 3: Birthday celebrations are taking place all over the world. The Debconf website includes a complete list of all the parties. Unfortunately some are bit vague as regards the venue and date**

## INFO

- [1] Debian Social Contract:  
[http://www.debian.org/social\\_contract](http://www.debian.org/social_contract)
- [2] Debian’s tenth birthday celebrations:  
<http://www.debconf.org/hoyears/>
- [3] Debian birthday party:  
<http://www.infodrom.org/Debian/party/>
- [4] Debian Mentors Project info:  
<http://mentors.debian.net/>
- [5] Tips and suggestions:  
[projekteueche@linux-magazin.de](mailto:projekteueche@linux-magazin.de)