Bits from the DPL
Debian, how are you?

Stefano Zacchiroli
Debian Project Leader

2 August 2010
DebConf10, New York City
Once upon a time

Fellow Linuxers,

This is just to announce the imminent completion of a brand-new Linux release, which I’m calling the Debian Linux Release. [...] 

Ian A Murdock, 16/08/1993
comp.os.linux.development
http://deb.li/bigbang

- make GNU/Linux competitive with commercial OS
- inspired by SLS, but better (quality)
- easy to install
- built collaboratively by experts, in the open
- free as in freedom

not many other distros back then
Debian today

- \( \approx 29'000 \) binary packages (amd64/sid/main)
- 120 “derivatives” (source: distrowatch.com)
- 11 releases
- \( \approx 900 \) DDs + 120 DMs + thousands contributors
- largest n. of ports among mainstream distros (12)
- non-Linux ports forthcoming (2)
- ...

Well done everybody!
lots of other distros today

some other distros:
1. ... release more frequently
2. ... have more users
3. ... innovate more
4. ... get more credit/press/...

Is Debian better?

Is Debian still relevant, \( \approx 17 \) years later?

hint: the answer is YES! to both

How so?
1. Debian is better
2. Debian shall “live long and prosper”
3. Where to?
Debian is better: quality

Quality

- package maintainers are experts
- no 2\textsuperscript{nd} class packages, all packages are equal
- “we release when it’s ready”

recent feedback:
- “we chose Debian because your packages don’t FTBFS”
- “we chose X [Debian-based], because we trust Debian packages”

Loads of other technical reasons
- n. of ports, stability, packaging system, documentation, old hw support,
- smooth upgrades, i18n/l10n, the testing suite, runs anywhere, technical policy, a lot of packages, …
Debian is better: quality

Quality

- package maintainers are experts
- no 2nd class packages, all packages are equal
- “we release when it’s ready”

recent feedback:
- “we chose Debian because your packages don’t FTBFS”
- “we chose X [Debian-based], because we trust Debian packages”

Loads of other technical reasons
n. of ports, stability, packaging system, documentation, old hw support, smooth upgrades, i18n/l10n, the testing suite, runs anywhere, technical policy, a lot of packages, ...
Debian is better: freedom

Firm principles: devs and users bound by the Social Contract

- promoting “the culture of free software” since 1993

community awareness: users know

- free the bottom up
  - in its software
    firmware included!
  - in its infrastructure
    no non-free web services (for users)
    no non-free services (for developers)
Debian is an **independent** distro (i.e. non-corporate)

- no (single) company babysitting us
- living up on donations (money & hw) and gift-economy

**People trust** Debian choices not to be “money-driven”
Debian is better: decision making

1. do-o-cracy

An individual Developer may make any technical or nontechnical decision with regard to their own work;

[Constitution, §3.3.1.1]

2. democracy

Each decision in the Project is made by one or more of the following:

1. The Developers, by way of General Resolution

[Constitution, §2]

that means:

- reputation follows work
- no benevolent dictator, no oligarchy, no cabal
- no imposed decisions (by who has money / infra. / people / . . . )
Outline

1. Debian is better
2. Debian shall “live long and prosper”
3. Where to?
"We lack manpower"

most commonly reported Debian issue (team reviews & folklore)

*that’s why others do better!*  
*they have more manpower*!!

is it *really* the case?

1. undeniable: we do need *more manpower*  
2. we need to put into *better use* what we have
better use: Releasing, a shared duty

either we scale, or we die (i.e. don’t release)

- releasing is a shared responsibility, not only release team’s
  - Rule 1: no RC bugs in your packages your responsibility
  - Rule 2: no RC bugs elsewhere your responsibility too

- do NMUs, welcome NMUs
  - follow the rules, devref §5.11.1
  - spread the “NMU culture”
  - my experience: http://deb.li/rcbw
    $\approx 180$ NMUs, no complains, lots of “thank you”

great news from the RC BoF: we’re getting better!
“lack of manpower” is proverbial in volunteering

- don’t cry for it
- ... with computers, a motivated individual can do wonders
- step in to be that one for some (core) team
  (yes, it’s harder than ranting on lists)
- you can, really
large changes are impossible in Debian, too much inertia

[ folklore ]

- consensus ≠ unanimity
- consensus is OK, but ultimately
  
  *talk is cheap, show me the NMUs*

- while we have both, do-o-cracy comes before democracy
do you want something to happen? just start *doing* it!

**Be bold.** Honestly, what can’t you undo?

*Sam Hocevar, DebConf7*
more manpower: An attractive community

discussions on developer mailing lists and blogs can be uncultured at times [distrowatch.com]

to join Debian you need to grow a **thick skin** [folklore]

- are grumpy
- fail to ack the good...
- ...to only pinpoint the bad
- fail to give credit
- fail to thank people
- insult someone
- ...

It’s not about being a **happy family**, it’s just being pragmatic:

- thick skin $\not\rightarrow$ strong hacking skills
- thick skin $\rightarrow$ less contributors

---

Stefano Zacchioli (Debian)
more manpower: Get more users

We don’t need more users.
We don’t need more bug reports.

We “just” want full grown expert DDs from day 1

Free software is participation

… and involvement grows bit by bit, from the 1st bug report

bonus point:
the universal operating system has users everywhere, of every kind
more manpower: Work with derivatives

- we have lots of derivatives ($\approx 120$)
- some are way more popular than Debian (10x)

in an ideal FOSS world

1. every derivative contributor is a Debian contributor
2. (and every Debian patch gets forwarded upstream)

let’s get closer to the goal: reach out to our derivatives

derivatives front-desk

- mailing list: debian-derivatives@lists.debian.org
- contact point: derivatives@debian.org
Outline

1. Debian is better
2. Debian shall “live long and prosper”
3. Where to?

Stefano Zacchioli (Debian)
Quality doesn’t wait for us

*Debian means quality*

...but won’t for long, if we just sit down

others are getting better too!
(and Lucas doesn’t only rebuild for us . . .)

possible future direction #1
(automated) testing, testing, testing!

more RC bugs! \o/
Becoming more dependable

Fact: lots of our users love our release cycle
Fact: some users don’t
Fact: quite some use the testing suite
Question: do we need/want to bless that suite?

possible future direction #2
Constantly Usable Testing (CUT)
http://kitenet.net/~joey/code/debian/cut/

Join the CUT BoF and voice your opinion!
August 6th, 17:00 EDT, Interschool lab
Welcoming non-DD project members

The “best operating system” is mainly, not only, made of software; it is also made of translations, graphics, musics, etc.

We already benefit from the work of non-packagers. We could use more and we should reward them more.

possible future direction #3

Non-packagers project members, do-ocratically.

(ain’t easy, but that is no excuse either)
Thanks!

for DebConf10, I hope you’ll enjoy it!

Your thoughts?

Stefano Zacchirolı
leader@debian.org
http://upsilon.cc/zack