

Presidents Report – April 2004

Welcome to the FirebirdSQL Foundation AGM!

It seems a long time since I helped register Firebird as a project at sourceforge in July-2000 but during that time it has grown considerably. Each year brings it's own surprises, and last year for me the success story has been the Foundation.

I wandered back into Firebird by accident. I became involved because I believe opensource will play a vital role in the future of software, and that a database that I'd grown to love in the early 90's, and still holds it's head up well, against the commercial competitors, I felt deserved a chance to be there and have a go at playing it's part.

Work started on the Foundation in June 2002. From that time, it has been a real pleasure to watch the Foundation start as a spark of an idea in an email thread between four people, grow through the fifteen member steering committee who created the legal and financially viable entity in Dec 2002, through to where it is now with roughly 50 full voting members and over 100 total members.

The effect of the Foundation on Firebird development during this time has also been dramatic.

The landscape in June 2002:

Back in June 2002, the project had been going for two years, and although much had been achieved, development work (and it is work – hard work) which had always been patchy was then slowing down. Claudio had stopped making his excellent bug fixes to fb1.0, and fb2 progress had slowed. Active participation as a developer offered few attractions, and some of those involved had even been financially singled by too much involvement.

So what was needed:

It had been clear since the start of Firebird that the level of work needed to sustain the project, and hopefully to allow it to make real progress required developers who could apply dedicated effort and sustained time to the task. It was also felt, again hopefully, that a few such funded developers would have the side effect of providing a backbone that would assist and support other unpaid developers working on the project.

Starting:

So at the two year mark Firebird had no funds, and the environment surrounding Firebird was not very supportive of developers and development. It was clear that we needed to try something new to get funds to direct towards fb development.

The spark came when in an email thread between Helen, Claudio, Dmitry and myself, very soon thereafter we, mainly through contacts of Helen, had fifteen of us in a steering committee each willing to commit to a moderately high membership fee to help directly fund fb development. Funding started immediately and then we started on satisfying the requirements to be able to make

the Foundation become a legal entity.

Here are the objectives of the Foundation that resulted from the steering committee work.

- a. To support and advance the development of the open source Firebird SQL relational database management system.
- b. To provide the non-commercial infrastructure and mechanisms required to
 - i. accept and manage funds raised by fees, subscriptions, donations, sponsorship and other means; and
 - ii. disburse such funds as grants to promote and advance the development effort.
- c. To encourage cooperation and affiliation with individuals, other non-profit organisations and commercial companies involved in, or planning to become involved in the development, support and promotion of Firebird software projects and associated products and activities.

Progress:

Dmitry was the first recipient of our grant, and honestly for Firebird it couldn't have worked out better. Many is the time that a bug was posted to firebird-devel, to which Dmitry responds a short time later with 'problem found – and fixed'. Every 3mths or so the fb commiteee has ended up increasing Dmitry's grant because he's doing such a extraordinary job - he is still doing much more work than the foundation pays him for! and much of the stability of fb1.5 is due to his tireless effort.

From the earliest days, Paul, from IBPhoenix wanted to sponsor the foundation, this enabled us to immediately fund Claudio to do reviews of code changes, and Sean from BroadView Software, while we were still only the steering committee, was so pleased with how it was going he offered to cover the complete amount we were sending Dmitry. This enabled us to also cover a grant to Alex.

As our membership has grown so has our ability to increase the amount of our grants, and we are in a position where we actually have a bank balance substantially in the black – And yes we should spend it as soon as possible!

Now all of our grantee's still do more work than our grants cover so thanks to Dmitry, Claudio, Alex and more recently Pavel for the terrific effort they have put in and to the furthering the development of Firebird!

Highlights of the Last Year

The First Firebird Conference

During this first year, the first notable event that comes to mind is the Conference. This was an unexpected, and very welcome, oportunity thanks to Holger Klemt and HK-Software who organised it. During the conference, it was extraordinary to meet, and talk, to so many people together that previously were only known to me by an email address. On arriving I remember

helping some guy in the hotel lobby for an hour to connect his laptop, before it finally twigged and I asked his name – And so we found, to our great amusement, that for the last hour Nickolay and I had been chatting away together without knowing who the other was!

I certainly look forward to attending this years conference where I will meet old friends, pronounce their names correctly, and pay Frank Schlottmann-Gödde the 5euro's I owe him!

Mozilla

Fortunately reason eventually prevailed when Mozilla decided to name their new lightweight browser 'Firebird'. Mozilla finally settled on the alternative name 'Firefox' And although the intervening period was uncomfortable, it seems that things have now returned to normal. The debate was heartfelt and intense, and during it we learned a lot about “branding”. Full credit must go to Mozilla, for the effectiveness of their rebadging efforts, this episode is now only a memory and even google searches have recovered.

(Svein, who is now using Moz. Firefox, and apparently only became aware of it's existence because of these events, tells me he thinks this whole episode may have been a targetted marketing campaign by Mozilla, to make Firebird users aware of the existence of their new Browser product).

Merge with Yaffil

InterBase has always had strong support in Russia, and that strong support has continued for both Firebird and Yaffil in the last four years. The merging of Yaffil and Firebird earlier this year, I think has strengthened both of us, and I'm very pleased to see that Dmitry Kuzmenko has been nominated for a position on the FF committee and that Marina Novikova, who has done so much to reveal who we are, with her fascinating interviews on www.interbase-world.com has also joined. I hope that through the merger, that along with our existing Russian members, their inclusion makes it easier for others in the Russian fb/Yaffil community who do not have english language skills, to feel some ownership and be able to participate in Firebird.

Release of Firebird 1.5

The release of Firebird 1.5 marks the end of a process that was spearheaded by Mike Nordel and John Bellardo in May 2001. It has involved a large amount of work by many participants, and ALL deserve our thanks for producing fb1.5. That such a large change has resulted in such a stable a product is a testament to their skills as developers. However special mention must go to: Dmitry Y, Nickolay, Arno, Claudio, and Alex for their part in finally get fb1.5 delivered.

Thanks to all the Foundation Members

Your support in the previous year has been crucial in getting what has been achieved done. Through the Foundation Firebird development, which had faltered, was restored and continued and this was a key factor in getting the successful result we have had for fb1.5.

So thanks for participating in a process that has helped the Firebird project give the good results it obtained. I hope that next year we will be able to assist in producing an even better results!

Future:

This has been the first year of the Foundation. The Foundation is evolving as is the Firebird project itself, and as are the companies that surround Firebird.

In commercial development projects if you want something done, you have either a) do it yourself, or b) pay someone else to do it. Opensource projects are exactly the same, however in opensource you also have a third option c) wait for someone else to do it.

Over a year ago we had no paid developers, now we have some, and IBP and BroadView are also directing some funding at development activities. To the point that recently there has been quite substantial development activity. So the problem is not with the level of activity, but with the coordination of the activity.

This is a tricky, but not unsolvable problem, I think the Foundation should concentrate on two things with its funding.

1. Ensure progress is made on an adequate regression test suite and testers.
2. Help support the setup of a representative body responsible for administering Firebird, and help provide it with funding to carry out the tasks it identifies as needing to be performed.

The Future of Firebird is in our hands.

Regards

Mark O'Donohue

President: The FirebirdSQL Foundation – April 2004.

V1.0