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# The AT&T AST OpenSource Software Collection

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## Abstract

This paper introduces a large collection of reusable software components that AT&T is making available in an OpenSource form. This software has been widely used around the world and includes well-known components such as KornShell, Nmake, Graphviz, Sfio, Vmalloc and Cdt.

# 1 Introduction

AT&T is not a newcomer to the UNIX market. In fact, it is where UNIX was born. However, AT&T is a newcomer to the world of OpenSource. This paper highlights our entrance into that domain.

UNIX was first invented when AT&T comprised the entire Bell Telephone System including Bell Telephone Laboratories, Western Electric and 23 Regional Operating Companies. This early AT&T company was a regulated monopoly restricted to the telecommunications business and prohibited from entering other businesses. As such, all inventions from Bell Telephone Laboratories unrelated to the telecommunications business could only be licensed externally. The UNIX system fell into this category and was licensed early on for academic use.

In the late '70s and early '80s, AT&T wanted to expand its business into new markets including the computer market. In exchange for this right, AT&T agreed to the now famous consent decree that split off the various Regional Bell Operating Companies or RBOCs. Bell Telephone Laboratories was divided into two parts, AT&T Bell Laboratories and Bell-core (subsequently renamed Telcordia) which performed research and development for the RBOCs. The UNIX system remained with AT&T Bell Laboratories and was commercialized for the first time. With the entry into the computer market, AT&T also became more restrictive in the release of potentially commercializable software.

In the early '90s, AT&T realized that it could not compete effectively in the computer business and began to refocus exclusively into its core strengths, the communications business. As a result, the UNIX

division was sold to Novell. In the subsequent "trivestiture," the company split off the computer division, NCR, and further separated the communication business two independent companies, Lucent Technologies for equipment and the current AT&T for services. AT&T Bell Laboratories was divided into two parts, Lucent Bell Laboratories and AT&T Laboratories. All copyrighted software at trivestiture time remained available to both Lucent Bell Laboratories and AT&T Laboratories after the split.

Our software research department, the Advanced Software Technologies department (AST), was formed in the late '70s in the original Bell Telephone Laboratories. It was separate from both UNIX research and development organizations. Our charter was to improve the productivity of AT&T software development. We achieved this by inventing new algorithms and techniques for existing APIs, creating new powerful APIs in the forms of libraries, languages and tools, and developing techniques for accurate build and configuration of software. The audience for our software was the myriad development organizations in AT&T. Since these organizations used diverse equipments and operating systems, a key part of our work was to develop techniques to enhance portability.

Our tools and libraries spread quickly among the AT&T development organizations. To help with internal technology transfer, a separate organization from research was set up to handle support and distribution. Unfortunately, external release of our software was not as smooth. The UNIX development group was responsible for outside release and they were often reluctant to adopt software that they

did not develop. There were, however, notable exceptions such as KornShell, Curses, and Malloc. The latter two libraries eventually became standard parts of Solaris, Irix and Unixware, UNIX variants derived from the System V Release 4.0 UNIX version.

Events turned worse for internal technology transfer after the sale of UNIX to Novell. To reduce the cost for software support and to ensure compliance with development methodologies such as ISO 9000, AT&T development organizations were pushed to buy vendor supported software. In this environment, the most effective avenue to transfer technology from research to development was to license the software to external vendors who, in turn, resold to AT&T.

The recent advance of the Open Source movement, with the inception of the Open Source Initiative (OSI), opened a new venue for making research software widely accessible. From our point of view, the primary advantages to OpenSource are:

- Increased influence on national and international standardization efforts.
- Creating and supporting alternatives to closed systems,
- The ability to attract vendors to distribute and support the software,
- Improved software quality due to widespread use, and
- Increased visibility of AT&T Laboratories in the research community.

These benefits fit well with the current business directions of AT&T which emphasize on building the communication services business, not selling software. Thus, AT&T intellectual property managers became more open to arguments in favor of an Open-Source software release based on the set of principles called the Open Source Definition as specified by the OSI on the website:

#### http://www.opensource.org/osd.html

In early 1999, we started an effort to release much of the software developed in research under an Open-Source license. After several months of discussions and many rounds of negotiation, AT&T has successfully produced a license that we believe meets the conditions for OpenSource certification and have submitted the license to OSI for official certification.

The AT&T AST OpenSource software represents many years of effort and covers a broad set of libraries and applications. Much of the early work was described in the book Practical Reusable UNIX Software [2]. The software includes a large subset of the POSIX utilities including the latest version of KornShell. In addition, there are many libraries and utilities not available elsewhere. The software is portable across virtually all UNIX environments, including OpenEdition on MVS (which uses EBCDIC) and Windows systems given a suitable UNIX layer such as UWIN[13].

It is neither possible nor appropriate to describe all the software components here, so the remainder of the paper will focus on our approach to building and packaging software and the terms of our OpenSource license. Interested readers can check the given references for details on particular software components.

# 2 Libraries

The AT&T AST OpenSource software collection consists of is upward of 3/4 million LOCs. Despite this large size, most of the software was created by a small group of researchers, about 6 at its peak. The software embodies some of the most powerful algorithms and data structures known. For example, the Graphviz package implements our patented graph drawing algorithms that automatically generate pictures of directed and undirected graphs with thousands of nodes and edges in seconds. A focus in our work is to make such algorithms and data structures widely reusable, not just in the tools that we create but also in applications that others would write. Another focus for our software is portability. We wish to make it easy to build applications that transparently compile and execute on at least all different UNIX platforms and certain selected others. The limited human resource and the desire for wide software reuse led us to conclude that:

A major part of our software development effort should be directed toward the creation of powerful reusable libraries that would enable other tools and applications to be built by simply assembling such libraries.

Thus, we embarked on a program to write software libraries that encompass core computing functions such as I/O and memory allocation and other new algorithms and data structures such as data compression and differencing and graph drawing. Below is a partial list of libraries available in the collection:

• Libast: This is the porting base library[8] for our software tools. It includes a common header

that provides common data types such as size\_t and others that may be missing on a particular platform. Similarly, functions are provided to fill in missing ones (e.g., bcopy() on non-BSD systems) and to replace existing ones that are inefficient. Libast also provides new convenient functions such as strperm() to convert a chmod file mode expression into a mode\_t value.

- Sfio: This I/O library[9] provides a robust interface and implements new buffering and data formatting algorithms that are more efficient than those in the standard I/O library, Stdio. For backward compatibility, Sfio also provides emulation code for Stdio that is suitable for both recompiling and relinking Stdio applications.
- Vmalloc: This memory allocation library[22] allows creation of different memory regions based on application-defined memory types (heap, shared, memory mapped, etc.) and some library-provided memory management strategies. A backward-compatible Malloc interface is provided that additionally allows an application to selectively perform memory debugging or profiling by setting environment variables.
- Cdt: This container data type library[23] provides under a unified interface a comprehensive set of containers: ordered/unordered sets/multisets, lists, stacks and queues. These container data types are based on efficient data structures such as hash tables and splay trees.
- Libexpr: This library provides run-time evaluation for simple C-styled expressions. It forms the basis for commands such as **tw**[7], a file tree walker and **cql**[4], a flat file database language.
- Libgraph: This graph library[18, 11] supports attributed graphs, generalized nested subgraphs, and stream file I/O in a flexible graph data language. It is built on top of the Cdt library and employs disciplines for I/O, memory management, graph object namespace management and object update callbacks. This library is the base of the Graphviz package to be discussed later.

## 2.1 Design considerations

Desirable qualities of a reusable library include applicability, efficiency, ease of use and ease of maintenance. However, there is no simple set of rules that can guarantee the simultaneous achievement of these

qualities. The design considerations below serve as guiding principles in our work:

- Necessity: This is at the heart of the idea of focusing on writing libraries before applications. In developing tools and applications, we first look into how they can be structured as one or more library functions. In this way, any resulting new APIs would be guaranteed to fill some specific needs and not just arise out of some academic exercise. For example, our versions of the POSIX commands were written first as library functions with the final commands being just simple drivers to parse command line options and make the appropriate function calls. Many of these functions are then reusable as built-ins in other applications such as the shell.
- Generality: Each library attempts to encompass as much functionality as possible without sacrificing efficiency. This sometimes means unifying separate but related concepts under a single uniform interface. A good example of this is the memory allocation library, Vmalloc, that unifies under a single interface various memory allocation policies including methods to debug memory errors and to profile memory usage.
- Consistency: We make sure that our libraries and functions follow the same interface structures. For example, many libraries provide functions to create structures to store states and return handles referring to such structures. In turn, these handles are used in future function calls to access stored resources. For consistency, we insist that the handle is always the first argument in such calls. This should be contrasted, for example, with Stdio where a FILE\* handle can be either the first or the last argument.
- Efficiency: A reusable library is intended to be used in many applications so performance is a key to its success. This means that its implementation should use the best available algorithms and data structures. However, this is not enough since different applications may have different needs that require specific adaptations. We developed a discipline and method library architecture[24] to unify different algorithms and techniques under a single interface while still allowing applications to tune for efficiency.
- Modularity: Modularity is the key in easing maintenance effort as it reduces the interdependency among different libraries as well as among

functions within the same library. To the extent possible, different libraries are kept independent from one another. However, there are exceptions such as memory allocation or I/O that must be negotiated by Vmalloc or Sfio.

- Irredundancy: Along the same line of easing maintenance effort, most algorithms and techniques are implemented once in one component, and all other components refer to this one implementation. In this way, we never need to make changes in multiple places for a single algorithmic modification.
- Extensibility: Extensibility means the ability to add or change features without breaking existing application code. Most of our libraries are based on the discipline and method architecture [24]. Where applicable, a userdefined discipline structure provides a version field that must be initialized by its caller. Thus, a new library implementation can then use the version field to detect the caller's vintage and act appropriately. The Sfio extended print discipline[10] uses this technique so that a new version can support an obsolete feature for at least one generation before discarding it. In turn, this gives application developers time to adapt their code.
- Robustness: Robustness means (1) thoroughly testing functionality, (2) keeping the code free from artificial constraints such as fixed size arrays or integer sizes, and (3) avoiding unsafe interfaces. Dynamic memory allocation is judiciously used to construct any required data structures. An example of the last point is our Sfio function sfgetr() that replaces the infamous Stdio gets() function and removes any concern about buffer boundary violation. Each of our libraries comes with a comprehensive regression test suite that was built over time based partially on bug reports.
- Portability: A basic goal for us is to be able to run our code on all platforms that we have access to. This includes all UNIX/Linux platforms and others such as Windows and MVS. However, portability means more than just that. Our software is configured using the iffe[6] approach to target local platform features and maximize performance. For example, the Sfio library selects between memory mapping and other I/O system calls by running a performance test at build time.

## 3 Tools

Aiming at an efficient, easy to use, and portable computing platform, we have reimplemented nearly all POSIX command tools. We also invented a number of new tools some of which exerted influence on the standards. For example, our KornShell language helped to define the POSIX 1003.2 specification for shell language and our Pax tool for file packaging has been included in POSIX 1003.2. Our tools provide a wide range of functionality. Below are a few examples:

- **nmake**[3]: A far more powerful *make* language that supports dynamic dependency generation and a higher level specification language.
- iffe[6]: We use iffe to handle architecture-specific features so that such information can be specified in the library source code instead of the makefiles. iffe detects architecture-specific features similar autoconfig, but at a much more localized level. For example, most GNU packages have a single config.h, whereas the Libast library has 25 iffe files. By localizing the configuration tests we can limit the amount of code that must be recompiled when individual iffe configuration scripts change. Unlike autoconfig and old-make, nmake handles all iffe file generation and dependencies automatically as part of the build process.
- tw[7]: This command replaces find and xargs and provides more general searching.
- cql[4]: This command provides a C database query language that works on both flat file and binary databases. It performs better than awk or perl.
- 3d[5]: This command is a combination of a shell script and a shared library. It modifies the file system semantics to enable viewpathing. That is, different file trees can be virtually overlaid on top of one another with a copy-on-write semantic to the higher layer.
- warp: This command is implemented similarly to 3d. It can be used to run a process as if the time were set to some specified time and the clock speed was set to some specific rate. It was useful for Y2K testing.

The tool development follows a few principles that help to keep the tools uniform, portable, and robust. We discuss these principles next.

- Conformance to standards: Our tools conform to the 1992 IEEE POSIX 1003.2 standard[20] and provide additional extensions where appropriate. Thus, at the least, strictly conforming POSIX applications can use our code without change. We have rewritten most of the tools in the base standard and User Portability sections except for a few such as awk, diff, mailx. We imported the GNU version of diff and the BSD version of mailx and enhanced the latter to add features such as MIME enclosures and IMAP.
- Conformance to common conventions: On various platforms, many common utilities provide extensions that are beyond the standard but well liked by users. Whenever possible, our versions of the utilities provide the same extensions. For example, most of the utilities accept the long name options that GNU supports. To handle conflicts between extensions done in different universes such as BSD or System V, we added a configuration option UNIVERSE to control the behavior of such utilities. In addition, the getconf utility is extended so that users can set configuration parameters such as UNIVERSE.
- Avoiding absolute pathnames: One of the banes of binary distributions is embedded path names. For example, the file command may consult /etc/magic for file descriptions. Its not appropriate for the our file command to look in the same place. Instead of adding a new environment variable for each candidate fixed path, we use the \$PATH environment variable, which must be set properly to use any package, to locate command related files. The convention is: the files for command foo are found by doing a \$PATH search for the ../lib/foo directory. A binary directory tree can be installed anywhere without recompilation; the only requirement is that the binary bin directory is added to \$PATH.
- Avoiding size restrictions: Our tools are freed artificial constraints such as fixed size arrays or small file sizes. For example, even though the POSIX standard only requires handling of text files with line lengths 2K or less, our tools do not have such line length limits. Instead, they use the record-reading function sfgetr() in the Sfio library which allocates dynamic memory as necessary to buffer lines with arbitrary lengths. Via the use of Sfio, our tools also transparently work on systems that support files with offsets larger than 32 bits.

- Combining related utilities into one: Whenever multiple related utilities can be combined into one, we do so. For example, our pax command combines the functionality of cpio and tar. In addition, it supports multiple formats such as ANSI and EBCDIC standard labelled tape, VMS backup and Microsoft cabinet files and also compression methods such as compress, gzip, and our own Vdelta[12] method for compression and differencing. Other notable examples include the unification of grep, fgrep, and egrep in a single command, the support of MIME Base64 and Binhex encodings in uuencode and uudecode, and the support of MD5 hashing in cksum.
- Self-documenting tools: Our tools use a common library function optget() to parse command line arguments. We extended this option parser so that it can generate the man page in one or more formats. For example, pax --man, pax --nroff, and pax --html would generate the documentation on the screen, in Troff, or in HTML format.
- Building and using powerful reusable libraries: It is worth emphasizing again here that our main focus is on building powerful reusable libraries that can be easily assembled into commands. This helps to maximize the reusability of the code. For example, even the KornShell itself was implemented as a library. In turn, this enabled the creation of **tksh**[14], a combination of shell and the Tk graphics library[19].

# 4 Graph visualization

A large part of our work is in software reegineering and data visualization. To help with this effort, we developed Graphviz[11], a collection of portable tools for rendering and interacting with abstract graph (network) drawings.

The main Graphviz layout programs, **dot** and **neato**, read text specifications of the nodes and edges of a graph, and emit drawings in a graphics language such as Postscript, pic, GIF, Metapost, VRML or PNG. We have combined these rendering engines with the graphics editor **lefty**[15] to build an interactive diagram manipulator **dotty**[16]. To provide support for a more popular scripting environment, Graphviz can be compiled as a Tcl/Tk extension.

Graphviz was also made into a web server by adding GIF and PNG drivers and a wrapper script

to run **dot** or **neato** as a remote cgi-bin service. This service is now employed within AT&T and by outside projects (for example, mozilla.org) and represents a simple experiment in how programs providing lightweight services can be reused more easily as web services than as packages that must be manually downloaded, installed and kept up-to-date. Also, for more sophisticated user interface customization we created Grappa, a Java graph library that communicates with **dot** as a server in the same way as **lefty/dotty**. Grappa can run standalone or as an applet.

Recent work on Graphviz addressed dynamic layout, where diagrams are maintained on-line with stable incremental updates. This work required devising event-based APIs and modifying the front ends to handle layout event streams instead of batch The OpenSource code release includes a component addressing the Microsoft Windows platform. Our goal here was to create a fully OLEaware network diagram editor. The editor is embeddable, may contain foreign objects as content and can be controlled via C++ or scripting languages such as Visual Basic. To achieve this, we factored the diagram editor into a generic OLE client-server, Montage [25], that provides UI management, persistence for non-hierarchical collections of objects, and domain-specific components to interpret user interface events or manage layouts. This facet of the Graphviz project diverged a great deal from our UNIX roots. However, Montage is a valuable contribution to the OpenSource community. To our knowledge it is the only fully OLE-aware software component available in an OpenSource form, and perhaps the only one outside of Microsoft, Visio, and Borland/Inprise. Moreover, the container library is a separate, clean design well suited to reuse, not laden with application-specific semantics.

# 5 Packaging

We employ a packging process designed to ease the reproduction of our environment on multiple platforms. This process provides a mechanism for bundling a set of source components, transporting them to another platform, making binaries from source using the native compilation system, and bundling binaries for use on other equivalent platforms.

# 5.1 Packages

The smallest distribution unit is a package, i.e., a collection of source or binary components. A source

component is a group of source files controlled by a makefile; the makefile and all related source reside in a directory named by the component. Making a component generates binaries from the source and makes them available for use. A binary component contains all of the generated binaries corresponding to a source component. Most components generate commands or libraries and interface files, but some may provide only documentation or data.

A component may depend on other components. These dependencies define a *make order*. That is, a component may require that other components be made before it is made. Packages might also have dependencies. For example, the Graphviz package requires the Libast package.

The traditional method to handle component make order to hard-wire the order in package makefiles or build scripts, with the restriction that each package reside in its own directory hierarchy. This method defeats any attempts at sharing code between packages. For example, the GNU fileutils, findutils, and textutils packages each have a lib source directory. Out of a combined 152 files, 53 are unique to one package, 30 are shared between two, and 13 are shared between all three. This is an unacceptable situation and inevitably leads to duplication and splintering — maintenance nightmares for a small group like ours.

nmake solves the component make order problem. Given a collection of component makefiles, nmake constructs a component dependency graph, and makes the components in order, using a separate nmake invocation for each component. Independent components are detected to facilitate concurrent makes. It is important to note that when components are added to a package hierarchy the new components are automatically detected and made in the proper order. This means that, barring generated binary name clashes, packages and components can be freely and safely combined.

# 5.2 Versioning

As mentioned, there are two types of packages: source and binary. These come in two flavors: base and delta. A base package contains a complete copy of all the package components. A delta package is similar to a patch: it contains only the differences from its base package. Unlike a patch, delta differences are maintained at a byte level instead of a text line-by-line level. This allows binary deltas as well as source deltas. Delta packages also contain delete information, so that files may be deleted from a component as it ages. Packages are simply compressed

archive files maintained by our **pax** command which computes deltas using our **vdelta** algorithm. Support files are simply added to the archive of component source as the packages are generated.

Delta packages form the basis of a simple but complete version management strategy. With a little discipline we are able to record and document software updates and bug fixes. Each component has a RELEASE, CHANGES, or CHANGELOG file that contains a dated comment line for each notable change, in reverse chronological order (newest entries at the top.) After component source is modified and tested (including RELEASE file edits), a delta source package is made to record all of the changes. Delta source packages are quite efficient in space and typically take up less than 1 percent of the corresponding base source packages.

Each package is stamped with its creation date and delta count (starting at 1). As a package archive is written, its stamp and the stamps of packages it depends on are recorded as files in the archive. When unpacking a package a simple sort on the stamp files tells if the proper dependent packages are present. Since backwards compatibility is guaranteed, the stamp checking rule is simple: any package stamp equal to or newer than the requested stamp is acceptable.

### 5.3 Source vs. Binary

The package layout maintains source files (readonly) in a separate directory tree from binary files (generated). This feature allows many binary packages to be made from a single source copy, handy when the package directory tree is cross-mounted on hosts with different architectures. Files in the binary directory tree take precedence over files in the source tree. So local modifications can be simply done by copying source files to the binary tree and modifying them there. In this way, the original and modified files can be compared, and changes made for one architecture won't interfere with the others. A source delta (patch) is simply made by recording the differences between source files in the binary and source trees.

#### 5.4 The package Command

The **package** command is the interface for all package management. This command is part of the **INIT** package that all other packages require. The **INIT** package must first be downloaded into an empty directory tree and installed (gunzip < INIT-yyyy-mm-dd | tar xvf -). Then other packages

can then be downloaded, made, and/or installed by the **package** command.

Each package has a description file, package.pkg (an nmake makefile), that lists its components and package dependencies. Any component described by an nmake makefile can be part of a package; no other files or auxiliary package information is required. The package is used for the following operations:

- write [base|delta] [binary|source] package: This creates an archive for package, including version stamp and binary checksum support files.
- read [ file.tgz| file.nnn ]: This reads the package base archive file.tgz or package delta archive file.nnn.
- make [ package ]: This makes and installs the binaries for package, or all packages if package is omitted.
- verify [ package ]: This verifies the installed binaries for package, or all packages if package is omitted, against the package checksum files.
- test [ package ]: This runs the regression tests for package, or all package if package is omitted.
- use [ uid|package ]: This runs an interactive shell with environment initialized for using package or the package installed by the user uid. An unfortunate side effect of using shared libraries (DLLs) is that some systems require specific (and different for every system) environment variable settings to properly locate the DLLs at runtime.

#### 6 License terms

The AT&T Source Code agreement was written both to satisfy the Open Source Definition, and to protect AT&T's intellectual property and other rights. Before creating a new license, we carefully reviewed the main licenses already in use, particularly, GPL, L-GPL, QPL, Apple Public Source License, and the IBM open source license. These were not satisfactory to AT&T as, for example, they do not adequately cover patent rights. Often such holes are just as detrimental to licensees as they are to the licensor.

The AT&T Source Code Agreement (ASCA 1.2D), listed in the Appendix, gives licensees the right to:

- Read, study, display, compile, and execute binaries made from the source code.
- Use AT&T patents in the original code to execute original or modified software.
- Redistribute the original source package in any format, as long the contents are preserved exactly.
- Distribute patches that include the copyrighted source code.
- Distribute binaries made from original or modified source code.

From a licensee's standpoint, the main conditions are:

- Distribution can only be made to those that agree to the license terms,
- If modifications to the source are made public, then AT&T has the right to include these changes in its package, and
- AT&T controls the contents of the official source distribution.

In many other ways the license terms are liberal toward commercial OpenSource licensees. The ASCA allows licensees to charge for redistribution. It also grants the right to use AT&T patents involved in the code, even when modified.

Some of the concerns brought up in the Open-Source review include those below. We felt that these license terms were reasonable, and left them in.

- A restriction against framing the AT&T website, perhaps to suggest a relationship with AT&T.
- Your rights under this agreement can be terminated automatically if we receive a non-frivolous claim of a patent infringement by a third party related to the source code on our website. In the event of an infringement claim, you would have to replace any infringing portion of the source code with non-infringing code or license the patent from the third party. For this reason, the agreement requires you to periodically check the AT&T website for such infringement notices.
- A "no strict construction" clause. This is an agreement that the license should not somehow be construed literally against what was really intended, to the detriment of either party.

Some very significant improvements were made as part of the OpenSource negotiation, for example, plugging holes in the license concerning the equivalent of "fair use" (since the ASCA relies on granting specific rights, instead of transferring ownership of a copy of a copyrighted work) and avoiding cumbersome restrictions on charging for redistributed copies, shrink-wrap licensing and repackaging of the source, among others. The AT&T OpenSource license agreement can also be viewed at:

http://www.research.att.com/sw/license/ast-open.html

### 7 Conclusion

This paper introduced the AT&T AST OpenSource software collection. This software collection is nearly twenty years in the making and includes tools such as the KornShell language, the Nmake system, the Graphviz package for graph drawing, and core computing and algorithm libraries such as Sfio, Cdt and Vmalloc. Many of the components were previously available for non-commercial use from the website:

http://www.research.att.com/sw/tools/

In just the past year and a half, more than 40,000 copies have been downloaded. Many large and mission-critical projects both within AT&T as well as around the world are dependent on these components. A frequently asked question from external users is "How do we license the software for production use?" This OpenSource release provides an answer.

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#### Version 1.2D

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