**Jean-Baptiste Kempf**

**President and Lead Developer of VLC**



In our society, cash is king. It is very rare to find an industry leader who will turn down an opportunity to turn a massive profit for their company and themselves by extension, often at the expense of the product and the satisfaction of their customers. This cannot be said of Jean-Baptiste Kempf, the president and lead developer of the VLC media player, who chose instead to keep their software free and open-source. While he only joined the project two years after its initial release, I feel Kempf has had a large impact on the world by his influence over one of the biggest media players available on the internet.

VLC was originally conceived in École Centrale Paris by students trying to revamp their campus network in the mid-90s. They found no help from the university, so they turned to external sources. A large broadcaster came forward and offered assistance, in return the students tested a new method of streaming tv over the local network instead of every room being fitted with a satellite dish. To help with this, the students developed a video server and playback app, which the next generation inherited as the older students graduated. The software was named VideoLan Client. By the time Kempf came on the scene, the software had been released to the web and seen a huge spike in users. The native version was developed in Linux, but it had been ported to Mac, as OS X did not have a DVD-player app at the time. A port was later made for Windows too. The devs made a number of smart decisions, including the creation of x264 encoding for efficient video transmission, which a number of tech giants based their entire video catalogue on. By 2009 VLC had 100,000,000 users.

Kempf separated the project from the university and founded the VideoLan organisation in April 2009. This may well have saved the project as the team became embroiled in legal battles over patent violations. It also made sense to detach the development from the university as the revolving-door nature of university-based student development meant there was constant turnover of team members. Moving to a fully formed organisation brought a lot more stability to the hierarchy and different groups. The main issue with moving away from free student labour was now funding the development. Many companies offered to bundle the VLC player with other software to sneak onto users’ machines. This would bring more users to VLC and would bring some money in but at the cost of fooling their customers.

Instead Kempf decided to keep the software free to purchase and also advertisement free, relying on donations from users to keep the organisation afloat. He also founded Videolabs which allows VLC devs to consults for big companies which implement VLC into their products. This generates enough revenue to allow the VLC media player to continue to grow while maintaining customer satisfaction and receiving admiration from the tech scene. The company has even spoken out against their software being packaged into bundles without their permission but they do not have the money to pursue legal battles against these third parties. The software is still open source and easily available online.

I find Jean-Baptiste Kempf highly admirable for his integrity as president of the VideoLan organisation. Time and time again, tech leaders have sold out their customers and employees and forfeited the quality of their product to put more money in their bank account, whether this be by running advertisements or harvesting their data to sell on to unscrupulous companies. I am under no illusion that Kempf has not seen an increase in his net worth since establishing his company and making development of the VLC player its main objective but time and time again he has shown a great moral compass in his decisions for the company and product, where someone like Mark Zuckerberg would not have. VLC sill sports nearly a million downloads a day, which shows that treating your customers right and running your company well pays dividends. I wish that any founder of the next big tech company takes inspiration from Jean-Baptiste Kempf.