

# Starting a new project

COMP8440: FOSSD  
Lecture 13

# Theory and practice

- Burst of enthusiasm
  - Many/most projects start with a burst of enthusiasm by one person
  - Few projects actually think about all the issues of running a FOSS project at the start
- Follow a recipe?
  - Knowing the recipe helps, but a good cook also improvises!
- Help or motivation?
  - Do you need help to write the first version, or just motivation from enthusiastic users?
  - If you need help, then setting up the infrastructure well is especially important

# Things to decide

- Think about
  - What are the project aims?
    - Don't be too grandiose at first
    - World domination takes time – start small!
  - What structure do you want?
    - Usually start with a very simple structure
    - One committer, easy contributions
  - What license do you want?
    - Don't invent a new license!
  - Source code management
  - Use a canned hosting site?
  - Do you need a mailing list? IRC channel? Web site?
  - How will you track bugs?

# Working code

- Start with working code
  - Before the first announcement, get *something* working
  - Working code gives positive feedback from potential contributors and users
  - Working code doesn't mean perfect code!
- Follow common conventions
  - Look at how related projects handle build and coding issues
  - Follow their lead if possible
- First impressions matter
  - Make it very easy to build and try the first time

# Announcing

- Initial announcement
  - Add the project to [freshmeat.net](http://freshmeat.net)
  - Find mailing lists for closely related projects
  - Don't spam every list!
  - Be humble – don't oversell the project
  - Make sure you include vital project info
    - What is it for?
    - What programming language?
    - What platforms does it target?
    - What license have you chosen?
    - Where do people find out more?

# Nurturing the project

- Positive feedback
  - The key to early success is positive feedback to contributors
  - Answer every contribution, be encouraging!
  - Answer email fast, encourage IRC discussions
- Releases
  - Get releases out fast and frequently
  - Use snapshot releases if need be
  - Post a summary of changes in each release
    - Give careful credit for all contributions
- Encourage discussion
  - Ask others' opinions
  - Listen to the feedback you get

# As the project grows

- Things to start considering
  - Packaging for major distros?
  - Do you want to do binary packages?
  - Should you write articles for magazines/web sites?
  - Should you have a development blog?
- Project structure
  - Regularly evaluate how the project is working
  - Do you want to formalise the structure?
    - If so, make sure to discuss it first!
  - Do you need to start defining project roles?

# Scaling up

- FOSS projects can grow quickly
  - Is there too much load on one person?
  - Can you break the project into modules?
  - Use separate mailing lists for different parts?
  - Delegate! Find people you trust, and give them a role
- Things that can help
  - Post a regular development summary?
  - Start a project conference? Or a mini-conf?
  - Look at how other projects handled growth. Pick an approach that worked for them