FOSS Culture

COMP8440: FOSSD
Lecture 12

Hackers

- ## Hacker culture
  - FOSS culture came from the 'hacker' culture
  - Hallmarks are anti-authoritarian, technical focus and a fascination with technology

A person who enjoys learning the details of programming systems and how to stretch their capabilities, as opposed to most users who prefer to learn only the minimum necessary

Hacker – the jargon file

Variance in convictions

- Is FOSS an aim, or a method?
    - For some people FOSS is the goal
    - For others, it is just a means to produce good code
    - Most people are somewhere in between
- Hostility to proprietary code
    - Some FOSS developers are openly hostile
    - Others just ignore it
    - and others use it when it is useful
- Hypothetical question
    - If someone proved that proprietary development produced better code, would you switch?

Forking

- Right to fork
  - Almost a definition of FOSS
  - Necessary to guarantee independence
- Reluctance to fork
  - If a fork is needed, then something is wrong
  - A fork is usually an indication of dissatisfaction with project leadership
- Branches – temporary forks
  - A branch is a fork where the intention is to merge
  - Some branches are long lived, most are short lived
  - Unlike forks, branches are encouraged
- Is a new OS distribution a fork?
  - Depends on intention to share code

Credit

- Strong emphasis on credit
  - Taking code without credit is frowned upon
  - credit system is built into most FOSS licenses
  - big contrast with proprietary projects
- Giving credit
  - Copyright headers
  - CREDITS file or ChangeLog
  - Website credit (some automated)
  - Credit in commit messages

Self Deprecation

- Modesty encouraged
  - FOSS developers often most critical of their own work
  - Crass self-promotion is frowned upon
  - The result is unusually honest documentation in the FOSS world
- Link to version numbers?
  - Many FOSS projects get stuck at version 0.9.x
  - Strong reluctance to consider a project good enough for a 1.0 release
  - Possibly linked to self-deprecation

Project ownership

- Who is a project's 'owner' ?
    - Starts with the founder
    - May be handed over to another by current owner
    - May be taken over if project is abandoned
- Project handover
    - Previous owner usually chooses the new owner
    - Usually involves a public announcement by former owner
    - Handover usually occurs only for 1 person projects

Reactions #1

To: tridge@samba.org
Subject: help installing Samba

Hello, I am having trouble with installing Samba. Can you tell me what I need to do to install it on Solaris?

Regards, xxxxx

Reactions #2

Dear Andrew,

I just want to say "thanks" to you and the samba-team for the great work you're doing on samba: THANK YOU!

Bye,
 Tom

Reactions #3

To Andrew Tridgell,

Good day to you, sir. I have a question to ask in regards to the licensing agreement on your rzip compression algorithm.

I've been developing a specialist, open-source archiving format that supports multiple compression algorithm, and I wish to include support for the rzip algorithm. The problem is that my own API that reads the archive is being released under the GNU Lesser General Public License due to a compromise with a fellow programmer on a related project. Do I have permission to include the rzip algorithm under GNU LGPL conditions, and if not, does the use of a standalone rzip decompressor (licensed under the GNU GPL) and temporary files as input, created by the archive's extraction process, fall under the category of "shared data"?

If you could find a moment to answer my query I will be extremely grateful - thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,
xxxxxxxxx

Reactions #4

From: xxxxx
Date: Fri, 9 Feb 2001 21:07:09 +0900
To: rusty@rustcorp.com.au
Subject: Dear Sir,

I have always wanted to flame you, however I never really had any good reason to do so. While your software creations were always egoistical and underdocumented, nothing really pushed the mark, yet. Until today, when I downloaded your "Linux 2.4" call graph utility. So, when is your next absolute-next-to-worthless but oh-so-cool-because-it's-from-rusty-russell piece of software coming out? Why the f*** don't you focus on documenting things instead of writing useless shit that "takes about 8 hours to run on my mobile pII laptop" or "generates about 180mb of vector postscript".   How about another example. I heard you were involved with that atrocity called "netfilter". Sure, it might have nice features and I am still considering using it, but WRITE SOME F***ING DOCS before you release complex shit like this for people to use! When I goto that netfilter site, I don't give a flying raging f*** who submitted 31337 lines of code to whatever f***ing netfilter module. That's your egoistical shit, and I could care less about it.
...... (more rants deleted)
... Uhm, that's all I can think of right now.

xxx (name deleted)