



Firebird Foundation

(Incorporated)

Incorporated as a Non-profit Association by the Department of Fair Trading, NSW, Australia
to promote the interests of the Firebird Open Source RDBMS Project

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President's Report, June 2007

The year past has been one of mixed fortunes for the Foundation. New memberships have continued to grow, but more slowly than in the past, with a relatively large number of long overdue memberships terminated. New sponsorship commitments have appeared, whilst others have dropped out without warning. Grant rates have improved in many cases and some new grant allocations were made. For the second year the Foundation took on the selection and organisation of speakers for another successful international Firebird conference but the conference's financial underwriter, IBPhoenix, sustained a loss of around 2,000 Euros.

Support for Development

An entirely new grant allocation was made this year to assist Alexander (Alex) Krutyakov, a talented developer with a strong interest in designing and developing clustering support for Firebird. A six-month allocation was made to enable Alex to familiarise himself with the engine code and its subsystems while working on a number of non-core tasks. Additionally, funds were earmarked to allocate grants for coal-face QA testing. We were fortunate to be able to secure a small part-time commitment from one QA tester but QA remains an area that the Foundation is committed to improving with more funding as suitable testers come forward.

Around the turn of the year the project suffered an unheralded shock when a third-party employer offered full-time salaried positions to three of our key core developers in Russia, with the intention of developing its own forked version of Firebird. At that point, one of these developers was being assisted by a Foundation grant sufficient to enable him to devote most of his working time to Firebird. In the two other cases, one was committed more than half of his working time, while the third had a half-time commitment. The offers of full-time salaries were considerably closer to real market rates than what the Foundation was able to sustain.

In order to keep these key people, the Foundation and three of our existing sponsors took action to enable the Firebird project to retain its key codeworkers. The Foundation's allocation for the project coordinator, Dmitry Yemanov, was increased to meet the third-party offer. The rate for Alex Peshkov's allocation, which was due for annual review, was raised to the same level as that for Vlad Horsun, which had been increased at a review near the end of 2006. The full-time salary equivalents for Alex and Vlad were made up by IBPhoenix hiring the pair to continue to perform Firebird core development work, but also assist IBPhoenix with its support commitments. This funding was also assisted by two new IBPhoenix support contracts with DRB Systems and Task Force Systems.

In short, the Foundation found ways to meet the crisis. For the Foundation, it meant shortening the "life" of our calculated funding capability from approximately 20 months to less than a year. It has also meant that the Foundation has been kicked into an urgent need to address the financial future of the Firebird Project with urgency. I will speak more about this later. From grapevine intelligence, we are all too well aware that more than one company has had the Firebird project codeworkers in their sights as staffing targets. If nothing else, the trauma of January brought home just how vulnerable our free-wheeling open source project can be to commercial head-hunting.

Our core team of codeworkers and assistants have continued to produce work of extraordinarily high standard. Since the last AGM we have seen the v.1.5.4 sub-release, the v.2.0 and 2.0.1 releases and the alpha of Firebird 2.1 with an impressive amount of new functionality. As I speak, the project team is building and testing the first Beta of v.2.1. Carlos Guzmán Álvarez and Roman Rokytsky have continued to keep up the .NET provider and Java JDBC (Jaybird) driver support, respectively, with admirable dedication, and Vladimir Tsvigun returned to his support role with the ODBC driver this year.

I ask members to recognise the excellence of the contributions by our codeworkers, both those who are helped by our grants and those who contribute their time and talents strictly as volunteers. It is in all of our interests for Firebird to keep up its advance towards Firebird 3 and the longer-term future and for the Foundation to make sure its people have a satisfying environment in which to reach their goals.

Conference

We had another successful conference in Prague last November, in surroundings that all agreed were much more pleasant and "conference-friendly" than the previous venue. We ended up with a lot of speakers and a wide variety of tracks. The fund-raising auction that has become a bizarre tradition for Firebird conferences raised about \$3,460 USD in today's money for Foundation funds.

As previously, Holger Klemt and his team provided excellent technical support and also produced most of the printed materials. Pavel Cisar made all the practical arrangements in Prague and IBPhoenix managed and underwrote the finances. The Foundation took care of the presenters, papers and publicity.

Unfortunately, the ratio of speakers to attendees was unrealistically high and the conference came out seriously in the red. With all of the other Firebird-related costs IBPhoenix is carrying this year, we can't make a similar commitment in 2007. The committee has been told of another company that might be interested in staging a conference but I have nothing firm to report at present.

Memberships

New memberships during the past year have been slightly down on 2005-6, with 12 full memberships (all Corporate) and 29 Associate. Existing members responded quite well to our Vice-president's periodic reminder mailouts, so thank you for your attention to those. Our membership roll currently stands at 209. Full memberships total 64 (45 corporate and 19 individual), with eight of these awaiting renewal. Associate memberships are 128 in total, but 44 of those subscriptions are either unpaid or overdue for renewal. We have 17 Honorary memberships, of which two are due to be vacated.

Do I really have to hint that payment of those unpaid subscriptions, worth \$4,600 USD, would help a lot?

Sponsorships and Donations

Currently, we have two Platinum sponsors (IB Phoenix and Tabulex), two Gold (Taskforce Systems and DRB Systems), two Silver (Apolo Ingenieria and Morfik) and one Bronze (Aage Johansen). We have received welcome donations during the year from a number of individuals, as well as from participants in the Brazilian developer seminars organised by Carlos Cantu.

Current Concerns

As most of the members will already be aware, a group of members (executive officers, codeworkers and sponsors) got their heads together early in 2007 to prepare a discussion document for the whole membership to use in the important discussion we have to have about Firebird's future management and funding. That discussion is scheduled to begin once the business of this AGM is finished. I am not going to go into detail here about the issues, since they are complex and I have no wish to pre-empt the discussion at all.

However, I urge everyone to understand how important your participation in the discussion is going to be. These are problems that must be addressed this year, at least to the extent that we can agree on a practicable management infrastructure that can be activated rapidly to cope with getting Firebird 3 out the door and a funding basis that we can provide to sustain it. Whatever is decided as the outcome will determine nothing less than the survival of Firebird, so please stay around after the close of the AGM.

Conclusion

Finally, I wish to thank the committee for its efforts during the year to keep things moving along smoothly. Thanks, too, to the subscribing members, sponsors and other donors for their continued support. And, above all, thanks to all the codeworkers: core developers, QA, platform porters, documentation writers and driver developers, for your dedication and your superbly professional attention to the work that makes Firebird possible.

Paul Beach
President