

Firebird Foundation Incorporated
Presidents Report
Annual General Meeting
30th June 2008

The year since the last AGM has been one of mixed fortunes. On the plus side, the Foundation's raw goal, of keeping the money flowing in, has been helped significantly through the arrival of several new sponsors. Such new sponsorships continue to be essential, given that past sponsorships are never guaranteed to continue and sponsor attrition is quite high. On the minus side, members exerted a lot of energy in the weeks and months after the last AGM to try to work out a preferred course for the Foundation's future that would consolidate the authority and interests of all things Firebird. The outcome was "no change", but not, alas, because the majority had arrived at a consensus that the current status quo was an adequate situation.

The Technical Task Group

Towards the end of 2007, as the "Future for Firebird" discussion in FFMembers dried up, members of the Committee picked up on the general impression it left that some kind of change was needed and it had to start somewhere. They convened a "Technical Task Group", by invitation, of Firebird Project admins and sponsors. The committee appointed Roman Rokytssky as its representative and the general membership selected Frank Ingermann and Martijn Tonies to represent all of us. This "TTG" group then appointed Pavel Cisar as its chairman and Roman as secretary.

Initial agendas were prepared with the aim of getting the group members acquainted with the project's worldview, especially its Roadmap of feature sets for forthcoming releases. The sponsors and members were expected to express views of the proposals and to have some degree of influence on the shape of the final Roadmap. For a few weeks, these matters were discussed, with the project's coordinator, Dmitry Yemanov, presenting a tentative roadmap for v.2.1 and 2.5 as fuel for discussion.

I was a TTG member in my own capacity as a major sponsor. As a member also of the Project admins, I think the core team did take on board what the TTG members were saying. The Roadmap that emerged was both realistic and encouraging. Six months on, the team has produced V.2.1 in full release, a V.1.5.5 patch release that has many benefits in the form of backported bug fixes, and a V.2.1.1 patch release that is at the moment available as a Release Candidate. The team has also been working on an Alpha V.2.5 that is currently being prepared for release as you read this. There is no doubt that the whole Firebird team has had a superb year and I formally thank them on your behalf for all of their hard work.

The TTG intended to make the main details of its proceedings available to the public. But, unfortunately, that has not yet happened. The TTG slowed to a crawl after its initial burst and has been languishing since March. Hopefully with the release of V2.5, the committee will re-convene to discuss future versions and continue to help with the definition of the roadmap.

Fund-raising and Resource Support

The past year has seen the initiation of a new Platinum sponsorship, by Great Lakes Data Systems from the U.S.A. (Lon Rosado), four new Gold sponsorships from Communicare Systems, Australia (Brian Dunstan), Intuitive Information Interfaces, Canada (Glenn Chong), UVData, Denmark (Jan Gaardboe Jensen) and Bas-X, Australia (Tony Wilder). New Silver ones have come from Comalex, U.S.A. (Richard Newberry), M-Files/Motive Systems, Finland (Antti Nivala) and QuickEasy Software, South Africa (Heinrich van der Vyver). Apolo Ingenieria, Colombia (Herman Freddy) was a one-time Silver sponsor and MS/EdD, U.S.A. (Kevin Donn) and Sourceforge.net (U.S.A.) were one-time Bronze sponsors.

Tabulex, Denmark (Poul Dige) and IBPhoenix (Paul Beach) continued and increased their Platinum sponsorship commitments, DRB Systems, U.S.A. (Steve Summers) and Broadview Systems, Canada (Sean Leyne) continued their Gold sponsorships and Counterworks, U.S.A. (Dave Culbertson) renewed its Silver sponsorship.

The traditional auction at the Firebird conference brought in more than \$5000 and the participants at the 2007 Firebird Developer Day in Brazil passed the hat around to benefit our funds by more than \$1300. The inclusion of a Donate button on the main Firebird website and some satellite sites, along with the "after-launch" link in the Windows binary installer kits of recent releases, have generated a thin but steady stream of one-off donations, both small and large.

An anonymous member company in Belgium donated a much-needed new Macbook, making possible the inclusion of MacOS builds in the project's mainstream output; while Broadview Systems continued to provide the project and the Foundation with comprehensive free hosting for all of our web-based activities.

Memberships

Current membership is 218. Of those, 108 are voting members, 14 that were new in the past year. Twenty-two voting members do not pay subscriptions (15 are honorary, seven are Platinum or Gold sponsors with waived subscriptions) leaving 86 full-paying members. Associate memberships currently number 110, of which 20 are new since the last AGM. Not all members are paid up, unfortunately. Reminders of overdue and soon-to-expire subscriptions are sent out periodically and it does help a little. Even so, the defaulting rate is consistently around the 20 percent mark, which doesn't improve the Treasurer's chances of making accurate forecasts.

We can always do with more members, so I would like to remind you that we have Foundation member logos that paid-up members can display on their websites to encourage site visitors to think about becoming a member. You can pick these logos up from the menus on the Foundation's web-pages.

The Committee

We started after the last AGM with the largest committee we have ever had: 11 ordinary members plus the four executive officers. Within the committee people offered or agreed to take on roles as convenors of three sub-committees intended to

develop proposals for the long-overdue policies on Firebird certification, trademark usage and third-party websites, respectively. Stefan Heymann made commendable efforts to try and draw interested parties together for the certification issue. Disappointingly, his contacts have failed to deliver anything so far. The other two issues show no progress reports.

The committee needs people who have something to offer, especially time to commit to and carry through on tasks that arise. A committee with with a small number of members, each keen to get things into focus and move them forward in an orderly way, is highly desirable.

Otherwise the committee has essentially concentrated on managing the payment of grants to the relevant developers.

Treasurership

Our old, book-keeping style of financial reporting had been outgrown by our needs as an organisation. In his time as Treasurer, Tim Benest, a professional accountant, had begun to get the financial reporting into a more conventional shape. However, a few months into the 2007-8 session, Tim retired from the Foundation at short notice. Alan McDonald stepped into the breach and was appointed to the office for the remainder of the session. At the beginning of 2008, Alan picked up on Tim's work and continued to improve the methodology, as you will see when he presents his annual reports presently. Alan operates his own business in New South Wales, under whose jurisdiction the Foundation is incorporated. He knows what he is doing and he is doing it well.

On behalf of the committee and the Foundation, I want to thank Alan for the good job he has been doing. I have nominated him for the Treasurer office with my full confidence.

Codeworker Grants

At the beginning of 2008, the role of coordinator of the .NET Provider sub-project changed hands when Carlos Guzman Alvarez handed it over to Jiri Cincura. The Foundation has a moderate grant allocation available to assist this sub-project, which has been taken up by Jiri. We welcome Jiri's presence at this year's AGM as our most recent Honorary member.

No new allocations were made in the year, although some allocations were reviewed and increased.

The proliferation of maintained Firebird versions has been laying a progressively heavier burden on the quality assurance area of the project. The Committee still has on record its commitment to increase allocations for this field when suitable codeworkers come forward ready to commit time to this work.

As a footnote to the QA issue, one member of the QA team, Philippe Makowski, established an arrangement with Masters students at the Université du Littoral Côte d'Opale in France to develop tests for the newer Firebird versions on various

platforms. This is a beneficial arrangement that costs us nothing and I am pleased to say that Philippe informed us that the university wants to involve students again next year.

At the final meetings of the session, the committee had on the table the question of allocating or raising funds (or both) to assist the Documentation sub-project. The committee has exhibited a strong desire to facilitate funding when the project has established some clear target tasks. The new committee can look forward to collaborating with the active members of the Docs project early in the new session with this end in view.

In the meantime, I am pleased to report that the Foundation has accepted an offer by Roman Rokytssky, coordinator of the Jaybird driver project and author of its documentation, to release the source material of said documentation under the Public Documentation Licence for a one-time fee of 1500 Euros, to be paid by the Foundation.

Firebird Conferences

The Foundation was not involved in organising the 2007 Firebird Conference, staged in Hamburg by Holger Klemm and H-K Software. As usual, it was a great opportunity for us to meet one another, learn something new, drink German beer and to part with our money in the Mad Auction. Thanks to all of you who supported the auction so handsomely.

Fabio Codebue is planning to stage the sixth Firebird Conference in September, this time in Bergamo, Italy. As usual, there are more good papers than slots to present them, so Fabio has asked some of us to help with choosing the ones that will be on the programme. True to tradition, he is putting a Mad Auction in the programme. Fabio's group is hosting this conference without help from the Foundation but don't be surprised to be asked for help as the arrangements proceed. Right now, as I understand, Fabio is very keen to hear from anyone who would like to be a conference sponsor. Conference dates are September 25-27.



Paul Beach, President
30th June 2008