

becoming a debian maintainer

(non-technical considerations)

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who cares? why bother?

idealistic view: give back to the community

pragmatic view: gain publicly documented experience

above all of course because it's **fun** (or else what are you doing here?)

this talk is about you if

- you're really **enthusiastic** about free software
- you've got 5 hrs a week (on average)
- you want to improve your understanding of how debian works
- you like coding and can find your way through manpages
- you are determined and persistent

why do I give this talk?

- 1998-2008
 - linux user
 - increasingly technical
 - willing to give back
 - ... but all I did was reading lwn.net et al
- 2008-now
 - maintain >10 binary packages
 - about to gain full membership rights

let's make sure it won't take **you** a decade!

why debian?

- **community-managed** according to open and well-defined processes (constitution)
- focus on **freedom** and technical **excellence**
- well-defined way of becoming a full member
- available at various levels of maturity (stable, testing, unstable)
- ...

what does a debian maintainer do?

Non exhaustive list of package maintainer duties:

(co)package upstream software according to debian standards

cooperate with your users and upstreams (bug triaging,
forwarding patches and bugs upstream, ...)

develop or maintain debian-specific software (“native”)

follow up with the evolution of debian standards

Other non-package centric tasks: release management,
sysadmin, organisational duties, translations, mentoring, ...

typical worries

do I have enough technical skills?

all you need is will and time to fill in your
knowledge gaps

do I have enough time?

- required time varies based on your technical experience
- a lot of time upfront; less once you get familiar with processes and tools
- whether you have the time is a matter of priorities

getting started

- **study the 3 docs (a total of 16K lines!):**
 - Debian New Maintainer's **Guide** (=howto)
 - Debian Developer's **Reference**
 - Debian **Policy** (=codifies established standards)
- **adopt an orphaned package** whose breakage won't upset many people (find one with wnpp-by-tags)
- or **join a packaging team** where you can improve packages without being their sole maintainer

step out of your comfort zone!

it's not meant to be easy:

- debian has high packaging standards (compared to others)
- debian builds software for many more architectures than any other distro

do try your best but don't worry about getting it right the first time

catching up and keeping up through mailing lists

d-mentors: learn what every maintainer is expected to know
(preferably by studying others' mistakes)

d-devel-announce: keep up with new dev goals and practices

d-devel, d-policy, ...: how consensus is built for new dev
practices

do keep some time for actual work :-)

find a sponsor and a mentor

- a mentor is someone willing to help out in private
- a sponsor reviews and uploads your packages to unstable

be happy ;-) (aka: have low expectations)

- there's no company behind debian so:
 - your emails/proposals/patches/etc will be ignored (sometimes)
 - you won't be thanked (most of the time)
 - you will be criticised (sometimes harshly)
- but
 - it's great to be giving back (especially through a purely community-based distro)
 - upstreams will be grateful for your work (sometimes)
 - **you will grow** technical- and communication-wise

pointers

why debian: wiki.debian.org/WhyDebianForDevelopers

find a package to adopt:

www.debian.org/devel/wnpp/
members.hellug.gr/serzan/wnpp/

contact me for help: [<serzan@hellug.gr>](mailto:serzan@hellug.gr)