Creating a more inviting environment for newcomers
New experiences from MoM, SoB, Teammetrics

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Debian

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Teams versus lone fighter

- More and more packages in Debian are team maintained
- In most cases this results in better maintenance
- However: small teams might "vanish"
- ➜ Reach critical mass
- Judgment call:
  Do I write the code myself or should I rather train a newcomer how to write the code
- Important: keep enthusiastic newcomers
- Training newcomers ensures survival of the whole project
- ➜ Reserve part of your own work for the future of the project

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Volunteer versus payed work

- No such "lever" like salary increase
- No period of notice for leaving a free project
- Not even clear whether somebody feels like belonging to a team
- Wanted: "compensation" of motivation
- Attractive projects
  - attractive technique
  - attractive results
  - attractive work environment

Inviting environment

When having talks about Debian at random conferences I was told by potential newcomers:

It is hard to find a helping hand for beginners.

While that's partly true there are some teams where this is not the case. The strategic answer should be to form more teams dealing with user oriented topics.

Team

Waking up in the morning and realising that somebody else has solved your problem from yesterday

Illusion? – Random example

Sat, 8 Feb 2014 00:16 A. Tille
Need some help for Java package

Sat, 8 Feb 2014 08:15 O. Sallou
I gonna have a look

Sat, 8 Feb 2014 08:42 O. Sallou
I was close to get it

Sat, 8 Feb 2014 09:11 O. Sallou
Got this problem, detected new one, need to contact authors

Sat, 8 Feb 2014 09:30 A. Tille
Thanks for your effort, I can give the authors a phone call

Sat, 8 Feb 2014 10:57 A. Tille
There is some other minor problem
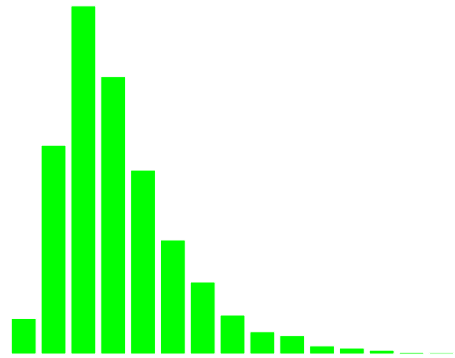
Sat, 8 Feb 2014 12:44 O. Sallou
There is a simple workaround

Mon, 10 Feb 2014 11:03 O. Sallou
I asked authors and they solved remaining issue

Mon, 10 Feb 2014 13:51 A. Tille
Thanks. Some last advise needed

Mon, 10 Feb 2014 14:02 O. Sallou
Code updated, problem solved

Example for a good team: Pkg-Perl

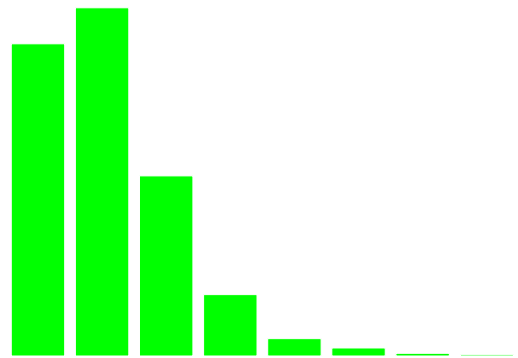## Maintainer per package graph calculation

- teammetrics database has commits
  package, team, commiter
- for graphing the following commits are ignored
  1. packages with less than x commits ($x = 5$)
     (exclude fresh or unmaintained packages)
  2. maintainers with less than y commits ($y = 2$)
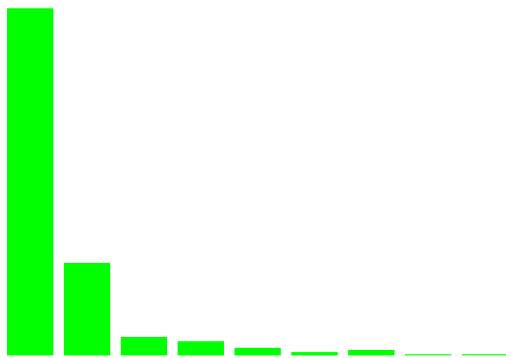   (exclude random commits of non-team members)

Team with room for enhancement: Debian Med

Example for one person "team": openstack

How to make your team attractive

- Write good documentation
- Write good documentation
- Do not let potential newcomers wait longer than 24h (better 8h) for an answer
- Be patient - every newcomer might be different
- Insist on open discussion
- Write good documentation
- Point newcomers to the documentation
- Establish methods to involve newcomers

Debian Med has attracted one developer per year

According to a *questionnaire* in Wiki

- Debian Med has 30 DDs+DMs (not all active any more)
- 12 DDs *because* Debian Med exists;
  4 DDs before Debian Med started
- 8 out of the 12 above extended their activity to other fields in Debian
- 10 out of the 12 above are active in Debian Med

Three levers to move newcomers in

MoM Offering time for education about packaging

SoB Offering sponsor service if newcomer considers Blends

Sprint Meet the team members in fruitful environment

Mentoring of the Month (MoM)

- Mentor dedicates a part of spare time to a newcomer
- Guide the student kindly into all secrets of Debian packaging
- Learning per *relevant* example
- Student is free to pick the package (mentor has a vetoing right)

MoM Goals

- The package in question is finished and uploaded.
- The student is able to do advanced packaging tasks and is introduced into the communication channels of Debian Med team.

Rules

- Responsiveness
- Confirm understanding
- Confirm ability to built
- Open communication
- Report

Summary of MoM formalism

- MoM is *work*
- Work is also *fun*
- Mentor trades spare time for the work of the student
- Attempt to train "silent observers on the list"
- Focus not only on technical details but also on learning to know relevant communication channels

MoM for women

- Motivated by discussion about MiniDebConf by debian-women
- Dropped restriction of topic Debian Med
- Woman should pick a package and we find the according team

Results

Month	Student	Package	Upload	Visible?
02.2012	Luis Ibanez	fis-gtm	yes	handover
03.2012	Scott Christley	libswarm	no	no
06.2012	Eric Maeker	libquazip	yes	yes
11.2012	Tomás Di Domenico	python-csb	yes	yes
02.2013	Sukhbir Singh	hunspell-en-med	yes	other
12.2013	Lennart C. Karssen	probabel	yes	yes
01.2014	Jorge S. Soares	snp-sites	yes	no
03.2014	Stephen Smith	phyutility	yes	no
06.2014	Ian Wallace	openemr	no	
09.2014	Corentin Desfarges	camp	yes	
02.2015	Paul Novotny	opensurgsim	yes	
03.2015	Yves Martelli	dwvexplorer	no	
04.2015	Malihe Asemani	manila	no	
05.2015	Afif Elghraoui	kmer-tools	yes	active
06.2015	Alba Crespi	r-cran-fastmatch	yes	
07.2015	Julien Lamy	dcmtk++	yes	

MoM Conclusions

- Time spent into mentoring is worth the effort
- No student for each month so the workload is bearable
- Students have just read recent documents which I did ten years ago → I can learn new stuff from them
- Major advantage: training upstream to pool their knowledge about the code with ours about packaging is **very efficient** for the hard packages
- About 50% of students had strong connection to upstream and requests for upstream changes went very smoothly

Sponsoring of Blends (SoB)

- Blends concept remains widely unknown amongst newcomers (but also amongst DDs)
- Newcomers might desperately seek for sponsors and simply do not know how to find one
- Kill two birds with one stone: Get the package sponsored after proving that you understood the Blends techniques

SoB rules

1. You confirm to have understood the Blends principle (have read the Blends documentation, are member of some team on alioth, reading the relevant mailing list)
2. Your package is maintained in a VCS used by the Blends team
3. Your package is listed on the Blends tasks pages (which is either because the package is inside Debian or in any Blends VCS)
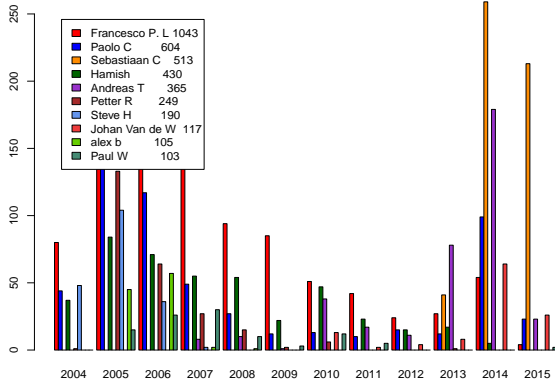4. You are unable to find a sponsor on the specific Blends list even after posting there at least twice
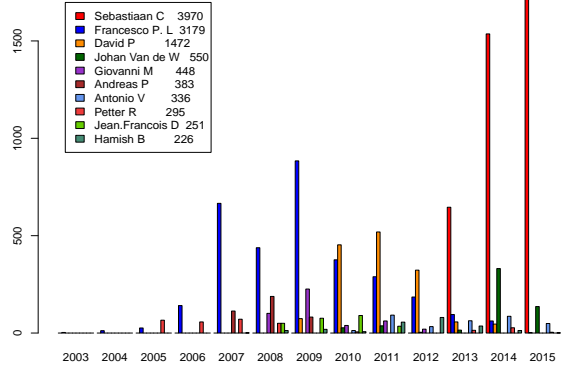
SoB results

- SoB was heavily used by Debian GIS team - now sponsees are DDs/DMs themselves
- Watching Wiki page and take mostly immediate action
- Lurking on relevant mailing lists as well on debian-mentors to catch maintainers in need of a sponsor
- If you notice a candidate for SoB please redirect them to me

Discussion in Debian GIS after SoB started

Francesco P. L 1043
Paolo C   604
Sebastiaan C 513
Hamish   430
Andreas T   365
Petter R   249
Steve H   190
Johan Van de W 117
alex b   105
Paul W   103

Commits of Debian GIS after SoB started

Sebastiaan C   3970
Francesco P. L 3179
David P   1472
Johan Van de W   550
Giovanni M   448
Andreas P   383
Antonio V   336
Petter R   295
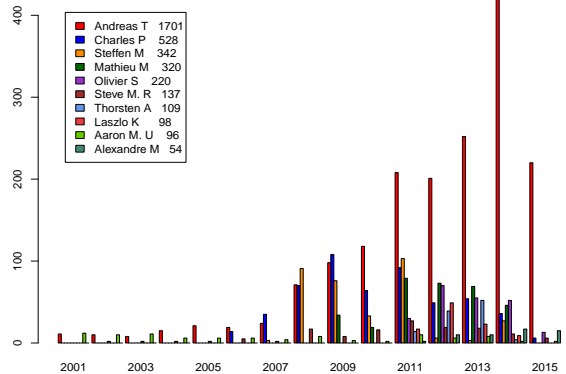Jean.Francois D 251
Hamish B   226

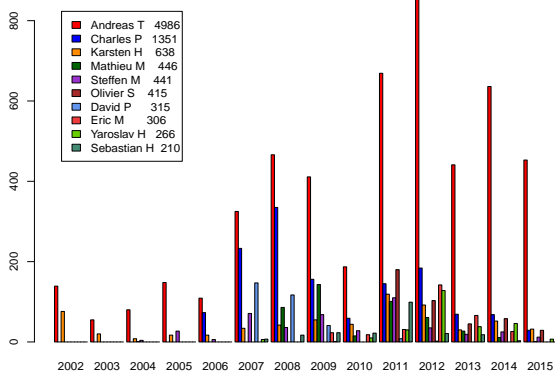## Face to face meetings with users and upstream developers

Have a quick look at what happened since 2011 when we started doing yearly sprints by also inviting users and upstream developers.

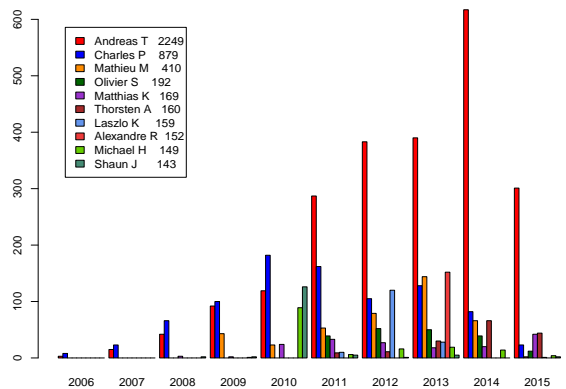Thanks for supporting sprints which we have proven to be successful
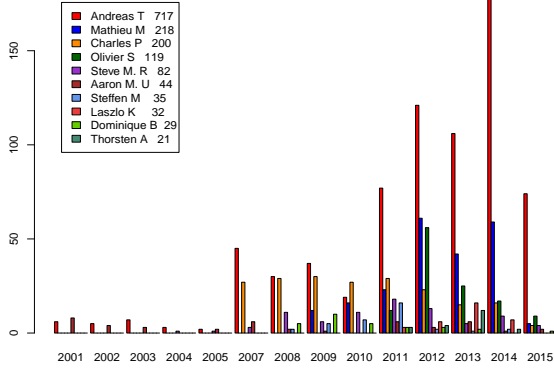
Top 10 Uploaders of Debian Med team

Andreas T   1701
Charles P   528
Steffen M   342
Mathieu M   320
Olivier S   220
Steve M. R   137
Thorsten A   109
Laszlo K   98
Aaron M. U   96
Alexandre M   54

Top 10 discussion on Debian Med user mailing list

Andreas T   4986
Charles P   1351
Karsten H   638
Mathieu M   446
Steffen M   441
Olivier S   415
David P   315
Eric M   306
Yaroslav H   266
Sebastian H   210

Top 10 discussion Debian Med developer mailing list

Andreas T   2249
Charles P   879
Mathieu M   410
Olivier S   192
Matthias K   169
Thorsten A   160
Laszlo K   159
Alexandre R   152
Michael H   149
Shaun J   143

Top 10 bug hunters of Debian Med packages

Andreas T	717
Mathieu M	218
Charles P	200
Olivier S	119
Steve M. R	82
Aaron M. U	44
Steffen M	35
Laszlo K	32
Dominique B	29
Thorsten A	21

Top 10 commiters to Debian Med VCS

Andreas T	10138
Charles P	3966
Mathieu M	2102
Olivier S	1327
Steffen M	1006
Laszlo K	594
Steven M. R	554
David P	536
Alexandre M	400
Aaron M. U	398
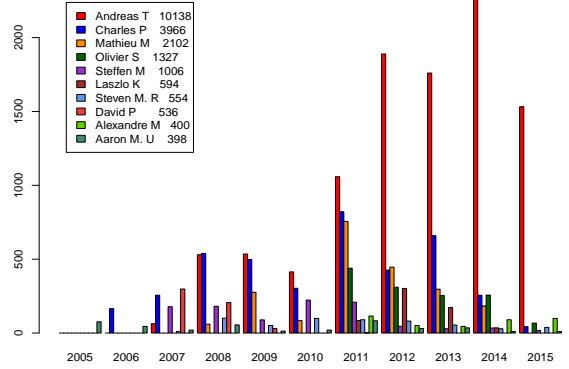
Number of Packages in selected tasks
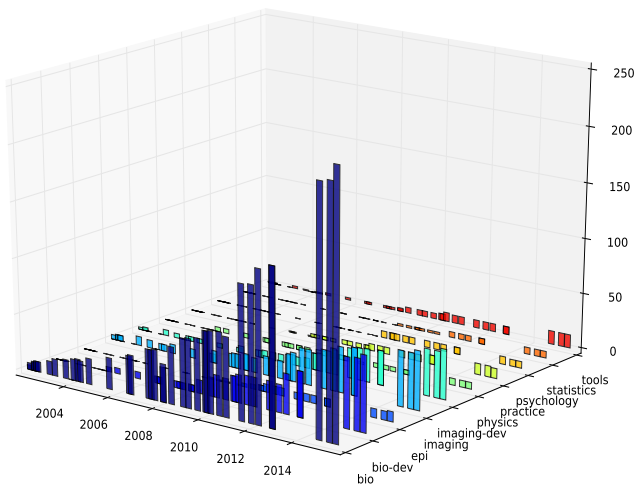
Summary

- Care nicely for newcomers
- Trade your time to involve newcomers
- Rank necomer issues higher than your own coding
- Do in-person meetings

Links

- *Teammetrics graphs*
- *Mentoring of the Month*
- *Sponsoring of Blends*
- *Debian Med policy*

This talk is available at
http://people.debian.org/~tille/talks/
Andreas Tille <tille@debian.org>