From the president

Boris Veytsman

I have been working in Silicon Valley for more than a year now. This place is famous for its startups, both for- and non-profit ones. There are many interesting tips to be learned here. I would like to share one of them.

Venture capital funders often propose to aspiring founders the following question. "Imagine money is not a problem: suppose you have a bottomless box of dollars in your office. What would you do?" I find this question very useful. Certainly money is a constraint for our (and everyone's) plans. However, if we imagine this constraint lifted, we can get a better grasp of what we ultimately want to achieve.

Maybe the following is a somewhat geeky comparison, but this exercise reminds me of a way to approach linear programming problems: we deal with constraints by first pretending there are none, and looking for the best direction to improve our target function. Only then do we reintroduce the constraints.

Now TUG is not a startup: we are an organization more than three decades old, a dinosaur by the Silicon Valley reckoning. Still I find it useful to think about the question. While the financial situation of TUG is stable, clearly there are limits to our available funds. Suppose this constraint is eliminated. What would we do?

I will list my preferences in no particular order. I would like to hear from other members about theirs. Please think for a minute what *you* would want TUG to do if money were not an issue.

There is the development fund. Right now we give small grants, from several hundreds to low thousands of dollars, to developers having interesting projects. This is definitely not enough. If we had money, we could completely change the policy. Instead of waiting for developers to suggest a project to us (and hoping they will finish it for the very small grants we can afford), we could actively lead the development process. We could identify the most important needs in the community (maybe scraping forums like TeX.sx and the texhax list) and offer substantial competitive grants to the developers. Of course, we should also give much more money to major existing projects such as CTAN, LaTeX3, TeX Live, accessibility, font development, ...

For conferences: we could increase our bursary fund and thus be able to be much more generous with helping (especially) students and members from developing countries to attend our meetings. We need many more new faces in our conferences if we want to stay viable.

Speaking of students, we could organize subsidized summer TeX camps for school and university students, develop teaching materials and reward the best teachers introducing TeX in the classroom.

For example, distance learning courses such as Coursera are quite popular, especially for programming related topics. A similar set of courses about TeX might help many novices and widen our user base. If we can make these courses free for the users, this would be a worthy project. However, we cannot expect teachers to do all the work for free. With unlimited funds, we could pay them a fair amount to create and possibly lead free distance learning courses for TeX users.

In general, the future of TeX, as for anything, is with the younger generation. We need to invest more in students and their teachers.

On another front, we could restart our book publications. TUG has produced a couple interesting books, but it has been eight years since the last of them. We could create a TeX showcase, publishing beautiful examples of TeX in action, demonstrating free fonts, interesting book design and, of course, good content.

It would be interesting to make a foray into electronic publishing. There have been many e-books made with TeX. A set of example books made by the best TeXnicians might further improve TeX's presence in this area. More could be done with *TUGboat* in this or other areas.

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Well, this was an interesting exercise. Now we are back on Earth where our funds are limited. Still, the goals discussed here (and those I haven't thought of) are worth working for.

The task of fundraising, recruiting new members, convincing organizations to join is hard. It takes a considerable amount of time and effort. A dream like the one above helps to remind us why we are doing it.

I hope we can recruit new members and attract donations to realize at least some of these goals.

Happy TeXing!

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