Development of DANTE e.V.

Joachim Lammarsch

Computer Center, University of Heidelberg, Germany

(X92@DDURZ1)

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Introduction

Reading the material I got via distribution mail from TUGboard and the minutes from finance committee I stated some correspondence between TUG with about 4000 members and DANTE e.V. with about 500 members (after 1 year of its existence). During the last several months there has been the question for DANTE e.V., as there has been for TUG, as to which direction the development of the group should go.

Spectrum of users

Who will and shall use TeX/LaTeX? If you limit the use to universities, the group of users is small and will decrease more and more, because more and more commercial software with a lot of advertising will set the direction of application for users. That means that you may not wait till the users will come to the university because in most cases then it's to late. A logical consequence is that you have to spread out TeX before students come to university, thus in high schools. Otherwise there is the risk that the current users will die out little by little and no new users will come up. But if a lot of students know TeX/LaTeX from the high schools and universities they will take it with them if they are going to the commercial world.

TeX in high school

There are two reasons why TeX is interesting for schools in Germany. First of all money is the most important factor. German schools have only a small budget for soft- and hardware. So if they can save money by not buying software, they have more money for hardware.

Teachers are interested in TeX for typesetting their papers for education in a good quality (as you may see by the teachers who are members from DANTE e.V.). The problem teaching teachers has been solved by DANTE e.V. in that way, that experienced members agree to give a free introduction to TeX/LaTeX in high schools. Thus trained teachers may distribute TeX/LaTeX just by using it.

There are as yet no plans to teach TeX/LaTeX to students.

But in some high schools workshops to students. But in some highschools workshops exist, which use typesetting systems like Word Perfect — why not LaTeX?

TeX for the youth

Since TeX is public domain for PCs a lot of persons are interested in it. But for these persons the problem is to get education. That problem may be solved by giving courses for beginners as DANTE e.V. is doing twice a year without fee. Another solution could be to offer courses at night-schools. That is in Germany a payable alternative to high school and university.

TeX in journals

In Germany there are a lot of computing journals which partly have a very high circulation. We should try to get regular columns there to present and discuss TeX/LaTeX and related themes to a big audience. Also there is in Germany is one journal where such a column already exists. With another one, DANTE e.V. has contacts and plans to establish such a column.

TeX in TV

By chance some days ago I met the person who is responsible for a series on TV about computer science. This is another area where DANTE e.V. will try to gain a foothold.

Result

It's not necessary to make advertising for TeX and related software like for a soap or a car or TV. But you have to look for the needs of users and fulfil these needs. You have to decide what you want to be: one of a small group of persons who know, understand and use TeX as a wizard (and partly earn a lot of money). Or to be one of a crowd who use and spread TeX. What is better for TeX, its development or the groups which support TeX?

What should be done?

Everyone wants to have the ability to get a version of TeX quick and easily. DANTE e.V. has a listserv on Bitnet, an FTP server on Internet and a mailbox. Besides DANTE e.V. is distributing software via diskettes for free to its members.

Information about what's going on in the TeX world and information for beginners must be available for everyone. DANTE e.V. is publishing quarterly a journal. For members with email access three mailing lists exist: `TEX-D-L` in general for TeX, `TEX-D-PC` for questions concerning TeX on PC, and `TEX-EURO` for support of users in Europe. All the information on these lists is available via diskettes for members who have no email access.

Everyone should have the ability to get immediate help for a problem. Members can call DANTE e.V. for that, and if it's possible the problem will be solved at once. Otherwise the question will be refered to a group of specialists. The second way is for members to ask directly one of the side-coordinators from DANTE e.V. There are for the most important systems and areas side-coordinators in DANTE e.V.

What's about the money?

Organization costs (normally) money! But it's not entirely true. Until now DANTE e.V. was able to manage all its business without own staff. It was possible to find volunteers who are doing all the work.

DANTE e.V. has the support from computing centers (University of Heidelberg, MPI Stuttgart, University of Düsseldorf, University of Stuttgart) and does not have to pay for the use of the mainframe. The mailbox has been made available by the company Breakpoint GmbH (Holzkirchen/Germany) for free.

So it has been turned out that you have either to pay for things or you have to treat to get things for free. DANTE e.V. has got a lot of things for free by negotiation!