Interview mit Kasper Skårhø

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Ist Open Source der Quell aller Weisheit? Sind Projekte wie Linux, Apache oder auch das Redaktionssystem Typo3 ein Schritt in Richtung Wissens-oder Web-Demokratie? Bekommen die Programmierer hinter den Projekten eigentlich eine angemessene Vergütung? Ein Interview mit Typo3-Programmierer Kasper Skårhø.

Typo3 ist eines der zur Zeit attraktivsten und intelligentesten Content Management Systeme (kurz: CMS). Es ist Open Source und mittlerweile benutzen es nicht nur kleine Leute, sondern auch professionelle Agenturen, die für kommerzielle Großunternehmen ein Web-Seiten-Design erarbeiten, dass sie dann mit dem CMS von Kasper Skårhø verbinden ([Beispielseiten]). Angesichts der Fragen, die bei Open Source immer wieder auftauchen, haben wir einfach einmal direkt bei Kasper nachgehakt und er hat uns geantwortet.

Phlow: Hello Kasper! Could you introduce yourself shortly... How old are you? Where do you live? whats your origin? did you study? where did you get your knowledge about programming and computers?

Kasper: I'm 28 years old, living in Copenhagen in Denmark and married to Rie. We do not have any kids yet. Rie is studying and we are living in a couple of cheap rooms.

I'm born in West Denmark (Jutland) and moved to the capital, Copenhagen, 5 years ago. I started to study electronic engineering but gained too much interest for Internet which was in the uprising then - so I quitted the studies and never went back. Made my own one-man company and worked freelance in graphics web design inspired by the David Siegel-style of doing it. By time I needed technical solutions to allowing customers to update their website without spoiling my graphical conceps - so I began to program a CMS in PHP. I learned PHP by just doing it. Never read a book or articles. Read the online manuals once in a while. Found inspiration from others once in a while but mostly I program from my inner compas of what is smart and what is not. Programming knowledge dated back to C64 assembler and Turbo Pascal and programming 80c81 CPUs (I think they were called). But in fact I felt much more visually creative at that time and really didn't see myself as a programmer (and not a

ALL when compared to many people around me...). So I was absolutely NOT my intension to program on the CMS I needed for more than a month or so. But... :-)

Phlow: Why did you release TYPO3 as a free Open Source CMS? Is there a philosophy or marketing idea behind it?

Kasper: First of all TYPO3 was commercial for a short period but then:

1) I realized that under commercial circumstances it had to be pushed out prematurely - thus I couldn't create the quality I wanted.
2) Too much time consumed by patching, marketing, satisfying stupid customer needs, doing a lot of SHORTTERM stuff instead of taking time to the LONGTERM goals.
3) Making it Open Source / Non-commercial made it possible for me to create EXACTLY what I had a vision for - no outside stress, all quality, all mine...
4) When I finally HAD a working product I also realized that the commercial way to go with it now wouldn't be possible because I was only one person, I didn't want to get into a business with others again and all I wanted to do was programming it. So the only way was to give it out for free - after all I finished it because I just "had to" finish it (I don't leave half finished work behind...).

Finally my christian perspective of life is also important to consider. People often cannot understand that I want to give SO MUCH out for free. But I really don't see my life as something where I'm hunting for material goods. I try to live cheaply, I try to spend money on only important things because I want my life - at least as much of it as possible - to be in service for my fellow man! I want to donate my talent that God has given me to the world around me. I don't want to keep it for my self but to show the world that there is still other factors in life than pure egoism etc. So I figured - what does the bible say? It tells us to be LIGHT in the world. To go in front! To start with ourselves. So I just try to do that.

Phlow: What are your experiences with Open Source and letting other people use your work without paying you money? Do agencies give you donations? Do you make a living out of typo3?

Kasper: Well, my experience is good mainly. It is really so amazing with all the personal relationships I have got with people in the community today! It's like an adventure! I don't think too much about that many people are using TYPO3 for money. I have long time ago decided that I will not be frustrated about that but just focus on the human side of it - the idealism.

Then some are inspired by my philosophy and understand how important donations are - so Yes I AM getting money from people by their own will - but it's only beginning to look like something I can live from now after 2-3 years! Generally giving out software for free and expecting people to pay anyways is really not a good business plan. And that was not what I thought anyways.

Then many are also donating their time - for helping developing, or helping others, or writing tutorials etc. You can donate by many other things than money! Very important as well!

What has hurt me the most during the times is when someone - some big companies ! - are using TYPO3 for some projects but will not say it out loud publicly - that pisses me off. Because they are like black holes - they just take and take and take but give absolutely nothing - all for stupid political reasons; They don't feel it's appropriate to say they use a free CMS! They are asshamed or something. That is really hurting me. Not only could such companies really sponsor a LOT of development - but even more importantly they could add enourmously to the credibility of the software by saying "Hey, we actually use TYPO3 and we trust it!" - but they cannot give even that.

Anyways, as a christian again - should I just pack everything together and close the project? Of course not. I will turn the other cheek and think about the small people with very little money that are so thankful for TYPO3 and feel they are the luckiest to have this system. Noone shall be allowed to take that from us.

Phlow: Do you think Open Source is a way of a new democracy where production, innovation and knowledge is spread without keeping the wisdom? When yes,why?

Kasper: Well, I would rather like not to answer this question. I'm really not the kind of Open Source guy that has a load of political reasons for doing Open Source software. I do for other reasons.

I agree with many Open Source agitators on many things but generally I don't think Open Source will save the planet. Yes, Open Source can yield really good quality. But it can also be a pile of junk sometimes. I think such as following open standards and creating true choices of software for people is very important. That should even be politically forced upon software vendors! But that is not the same as everything should be Open Source.

Then I also believe in quality and that it should not cost "a million". I really hated that whole ".com"-wave with hot-shots that sold balloons with hot air inside for millions of EUROs - and I'm really happy that everything is now more down-to-earth and realistic. Honesty and fairness is important but suffer too often in the capitalistic economy. But I don't claim to have found an alternative.

Generally I believe that human nature is egoistic. And maybe this is an answer to your question because I think that Open Source software is capable of spreading a different mentality of abundance and help to dig out all the positive things inside of us - like sharing and contributing and thinking of other people than ourselves all the time.

Phlow: Did you expect such a success in the online and computer-world?

Kasper: Absolutely not. I had no expectations. So I have been pleasantly surprised!

Phlow: Can you tell me some nice reactions, emails or happenings around your work/typo3?

Kasper: Well, there are so many! I often get emails with people telling me how enthusiastic they are. That is always nice. But I think the most touching thing was the first snowboard tour. After saying goodbye to the last five people on the way home to Denmark I suddently realized how fantastic it was! How all these people had been brought together in such a friendly spirit and with so much enthusiasm. I really mean it - it was worth it all. All the time spend on programming, all the money I have NOT earned - but being a part of something with such beauty as meeting these people in this way - I was very very thankful and still am.

Phlow: How would you describe yourself?

I'm often quite "destreet" (you know that word?) - like a professor in his own world. I'm not much fun when I'm in the middle of all my development. Then I just want to focus. Apart from that I'm pretty average I think. I'm not passionate about much else that TYPO3 because I just can't pour energy into more. So I try to relax with my wife and pay attension to her and my friends. I'm not so good that that though.

Phlow: Thank you very much for the interview :)

Kasper: You are welcome.