

1.1. What Is Debian?

CULTURE

Origin of the Debian name

Look no further: Debian is not an acronym. This name is, in reality, a contraction of two first names: that of Ian Murdock, and his girlfriend at the time, Debra. Debra + Ian = Debian.

Debian is a GNU/Linux and GNU/kFreeBSD distribution. We will discuss what a distribution is in further detail in Section 1.4, “The Role of Distributions” (page 21), but for now, we will simply state that it is a complete operating system, including software and systems for installation and management, all based on the Linux or FreeBSD kernel and free software (especially those from the GNU project).

When he created Debian, in 1993, under the leadership of the FSF, Ian Murdock had clear objectives, which he expressed in the *Debian Manifesto*. The free operating system that he sought would have to have two principal features. First, quality: Debian would be developed with the greatest care, to be worthy of the Linux kernel. It would also be a non-commercial distribution, sufficiently credible to compete with major commercial distributions. This double ambition would, in his eyes, only be achieved by opening the Debian development process just like that of Linux and the GNU project. Thus, peer review would continuously improve the product.

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GNU, the project of the FSF

The GNU project is a range of free software developed, or sponsored, by the Free Software Foundation (FSF), originated by its iconic leader, Dr. Richard M. Stallman. GNU is a recursive acronym, standing for “GNU is Not Unix”.

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Richard Stallman

FSF's founder and author of the GPL license, Richard M. Stallman (often referred to by his initials, RMS) is a charismatic leader of the Free Software movement. Due to his uncompromising positions, he's not unanimously admired, but his non-technical contributions to Free Software (in particular at the legal and philosophical level) are respected by everybody.

1.1.1. A Multi-Platform Operating System

COMMUNITY

Ian Murdock's journey

Ian Murdock, founder of the Debian project, was its first leader, from 1993 to 1996. After passing the baton to Bruce Perens, Ian took a less public role. He returned to working behind the scenes of the free software community, creating the Progeny company, with the intention of marketing a distribution derived from Debian. This venture was a commercial failure, sadly, and development abandoned. The company, after several years of scraping by, simply as a service provider, eventually filed for bankruptcy in April of 2007. Of the various projects initiated by Progeny, only *discover* still remains. It is an automatic hardware detection tool.