

L^AT_EX News

Issue 19, September 2009

New L^AT_EX release

This issue of L^AT_EX News marks the first release of a new version of L^AT_EX 2_ε since the publication of The L^AT_EX Companion in 2005–2006.

Just in time for T_EX Live 2009, this version is a maintenance release and introduces no new features. A number of small changes have been made to correct minor bugs in the kernel, slightly extend the Unicode support, and improve various aspects of some of the tools packages.

New code repository

Since the last L^AT_EX release, the entire code base has been moved to a public SVN repository¹ and the entire build architecture re-written. In fact, it has only been possible for us to consider a new L^AT_EX release since earlier this year when the test suite was finally set up with the new system. In the process, a bug in the L^AT_EX picture fonts distributed with T_EX Live was discovered, proving that the tests are working and are still very valuable.

Now that we can easily generate new packaged versions of the L^AT_EX 2_ε distribution, we expect to be able to roll out bug fixes in a much more timely manner than over the last few years. New versions should be distributed yearly with T_EX Live. Having said this, the maintenance of the L^AT_EX 2_ε kernel is slowing down as the bugs become fewer and more subtle. Remember that we cannot change any of the underlying architecture of the kernel or any design decisions of the standard classes because we must preserve backwards compatibility with legacy documents at all costs.

Even new features cannot be added, because any new documents using them will not compile in systems (such as journal production engines) that are generally not updated once they've been proven to work as necessary.

None of this is to say that we consider L^AT_EX 2_ε to be any less relevant for document production than in years past: a stable system is a useful one. Moreover, the package system continues to provide a flourishing and stable means for the development of a wide range of extensions.

Babel

One area of the L^AT_EX 2_ε code base that is still receiving feedback to be incorporated into the main distribution is the Babel system for multilingual typesetting. While the Babel sources have already been added to the SVN repository the integration of the test system for Babel is still outstanding.

The future

While work on L^AT_EX 2_ε tends to maintenance over active development, the L^AT_EX 3 project is seeing new life. Our goals here are to provide a transition from the L^AT_EX 2_ε document processing model to one with a more flexible foundation. Work is continuing in the `expl3` programming language and the `xpackages` for document design. Future announcements about L^AT_EX 3 will be available via the L^AT_EX Project website and in TUGboat.

¹<http://www.latex-project.org/svnroot/latex2e-public/>