

Debathena Intrepid Release Notes

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This is a beta release for selected Linux workstations only.

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In March 2009, IS&T released the first supported version of Debathena to selected Linux workstations in W20-575, 12-182, 56-129 and 66-080 (a total of 20 workstations across all clusters). Debathena represents a new port of the Athena software to Ubuntu Linux and is the first major update to the Athena platform in 4 years.

The Debathena project brings Athena to all Debian-based distributions (including Ubuntu) and is a joint collaboration between the Student Information Processing Board and Information Services & Technology. For more information on the Debathena project, see <http://debathena.mit.edu>.

Summary of Changes

Some of the most visible changes effective with this release are the following:

Operating System Changes:

- Red Hat Enterprise Linux 4 replaced with Ubuntu 8.10 ("Intrepid")

Basic Application Software:

- GNOME components (including Evolution) upgraded to version 2.24
- The "sudo" command is now supported on public workstations
- The Console window has been removed
- No notification of new email messages in Console window
- The legacy Sawfish window manager has been removed
- The legacy Dash interface has been removed
- Lockers are automounted on /mit simply by accessing by /mit/*lockername*
- Removable devices (CDs, DVDs, USB drives) will automatically mount; root access is no longer required
- Change in handling of legacy `~/ .tcshrc` files
- Removal of certain legacy tcsh environment variables

For Developers:

- Libraries such as GNOME and Gtk+ are now the standard OS-provided versions rather than custom MIT versions
- /usr/athena and /bin/athena are now symlinks and provided for compatibility only, so standard paths can be used in shell scripts

For Private Workstation Owners:

- This release is not intended for use on Private Workstations.

Technical Changes:

- Improved user management with Hesiod and nss_nonlocal.
- attach is no longer setuid root.

Operating System Updates

Red Hat Enterprise Linux 4 replaced with Ubuntu 8.10 ("Intrepid"). While Debathena supports all Debian-based distributions, IS&T has selected the latest release of Ubuntu (8.10) for the public cluster environment. Ubuntu is designed with usability in mind and is by far the most popular Linux distribution among incoming students.

Basic Application Software

GNOME components (including Evolution) upgraded to version 2.24. This version of GNOME is included with Ubuntu 8.10 and includes significant improvements in features and usability over the previous 2.8 version.

The "sudo" command is now supported on public workstations. Users can now use the "sudo" command (which uses your Kerberos password) to become root in addition to the "su" command (which uses the workstation's root password). The default root password has not changed.

The Console window has been removed. The Console window has been removed from this release due to incompatibilities with the Ubuntu login process. We may restore this functionality in future releases.

No notification of new email messages in Console window. As the Console window has been removed, we can no longer display the number of new email messages on the server.

The legacy Sawfish window manager has been removed. This window manager is no longer supported by IS&T. Private workstation users can continue to install and use it, but `~/ .athena-sawfish` files will no longer be honored.

The legacy Dash interface has been removed. The Dash interface was a remnant from the Athena 8.0 days and was becoming increasingly incompatible with modern software. We have decided not to include this interface with Debathena, and `~/ .athena-dash` files will not be honored.

Lockers are automounted on /mit simply by accessing by `/mit/lockername`. While the **attach** command remains in Debathena, lockers can be accessed simply by accessing the relevant directory under /mit. If you wish to run software out of lockers, you will still need to use the **add** command.

Removable devices (CDs, DVDs, USB drives) will automatically mount; root access is no longer required. Removable device support has been vastly improved by virtue of switching to Ubuntu as the underlying operating system. The **attach-usb** command in the **consult** locker is no longer necessary to mount USB drives.

Change in handling of legacy `~/ .tcshrc` files. Users with very old accounts may have `~/ .tcshrc` files. These files will not be executed instead of `~/ .cshrc`, meaning that users with `~/ .tcshrc` files will not receive a number of Athena customizations. If you experience problems logging in to Athena, check for a `~/ .tcshrc` file in your account and rename it. If any content in your `~/ .tcshrc` file is still relevant, please migrate it into `~/ .cshrc.mine`

Removal of certain legacy tcsh environment variables. The `$athena_path` and `$athena_manpath` variables no longer exist, and you should not reference them in your dotfiles. Use `$PATH` and `$MANPATH` instead.

For Developers

Libraries such as GNOME and Gtk+ are now the standard OS-provided versions rather than custom MIT versions. Building software on Athena should be easier since most **configure** scripts or **Makefiles** should have no problem locating the necessary libraries.

`/usr/athena` and `/bin/athena` are now symlinks and provided for compatibility only, so standard paths can be used in shell scripts. Using Athena as a development platform is much easier, since there should be no need to change shebang (`#!`) lines in shell scripts or special case the location of various programs. All user binaries are in `/usr/bin` or `/bin`, and all sysadmin binaries are in `/usr/sbin` or `/sbin`.

For Private Workstation Owners

This release is not intended for use on Private Workstations. Private Workstation owners should wait until Summer 2009 to install the next release of Debathena.

Technical Changes

Improved user management with Hesiod and `nss_nonlocal`. Previously, user management was accomplished by adding users to the `/etc/passwd` file when they logged in. User information is now retrieved directly from Hesiod via the `nsswitch` library. This has the advantage that information like the user's shell updates immediately upon a change in Hesiod, rather than waiting for the user to logout. The `nss_nonlocal` modules is included in order to avoid any security problems related to namespace conflicts between local and Athena-wide users.

`attach` is no longer setuid root. The `attach` program on Debathena runs setgid `attach`, not setuid root. While lockers can be accessed via the /mit automounter, the `attach` program is still useful for the `add` shell function and Zephyr subscription functionality.

Related Links

[Athena 9.4 System Release Notes]

[Athena at MIT](#)

[Athena Online Help](#)

[Athena Consultants](#)

[Debathena Private Workstation Owner Guide](#)