Why We Moved to a Forum
Discussions on Community Tooling

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Agenda

- What makes a community
- What tooling should we use to support that
- What tools might be right for your community?

Are you using the right tools now?
Who am I anyway?

- Joined the Foreman community 7 years ago
- Volunteer contributor
- Core developer
- Community lead

- Help out in numerous other communities

- But mainly...
  - I’ve been in communities all my life
  - So have you 😊
Community (noun, often attributive)

1c: “a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society”

// “The scientific community”
// “The academic community”

➢ Merriam-Webster
Communities are Everywhere

- Families & Friends
- Work colleagues
- Sports
- Hobbies
- Locality (e.g. village councils)

- Exist online & offline
  - Online communities are strange beasts...
Communication

• Communities are nothing without it
• Most communities form in-person
• Communication is more than words
  – Tone / Attitude
  – Gestures
  – Facial expressions
  – Cultural expectations
  – ...
• Online communication loses a lot of this
  – It’s our job to figure out how to mitigate
“Building effective communication channels … [involves] avoiding communication fetishism and keeping all your eyeballs in one place”

➢ Jono Bacon – The Art of Community

http://www.artofcommunityonline.org/
Channel fragmentation is BAD

- Many choices for communication
  - IRC
  - Mailing Lists
  - Forums
  - Social Media
  - Answer sites (StackOverflow etc)
  - Discord
  - ...

One tool per job

• Pick one tool per **type of communication**
• Types
  - Real time
    • Pro: socialising, partnering, ad-hoc thinking
    • Con: inclusivity, history, decision making
  - Asynchronous
    • Pro: inclusivity, history, decision making
    • Con: slow, formal
  - In-person events (even more exclusive than chat)
  - Video calls (somewhat exclusive, hard to log)
Case Study

TheForeman Community

August 2017
IRC Lines of Text / Week
Oh dear...
Now what?
Why a forum?

For users

• Better help with problems
  - Search / suggestions
  - Tagging
  - Solved / unsolved (plugins)

• Not a firehose of email
  - Subscribe to specific categories / tags
  - Still get email when mentioned
  - Push notifications
  - Digests
Why a forum?

For developers

- All of the above
- Self-service groups & group notifies
- Rich discussion support
  - Markdown
  - Polls
  - Wiki posts (& Checklists plugin)
  - Discoverability of discussions
- Foreman specific: UI tooling to attract UI devs
Why a forum?

For the community team

- All of the above
- Content handling / promotion
  - RSS feeds
  - Blog integration (comments)
- Moderation & cleanup tools
  - Very good tooling around spam
- Automated member promotions
- Events management (plugin)
- Social interaction “proxies”
Did it work?

Yes!
Did it work?

Yes!
Migration Plan

- 4 week study / discussion
- T-4 weeks - announcement
- T-3 weeks – moderation teams
- T-2 weeks - Documentation
- T-1 week – Final checks
- Migration
- Mailing list switched to read-only
Key Take-aways
Communication is critical
Think about what tools you need
One tool per type!

Thanks!
Questions?
https://community.theforeman.org