



Meet Ubuntu's Community Manager

DIVERSE UBUNTU UNIVERSE

Ladies and gents, boys and girls, I would like to give you a very warm welcome to my brand spanking new column.

BY JONO BACON

today, it limited the scope of who could get involved.

Today the story is far different. Every day we hear wonderful tales and experiences across the free software world about the diverse range of people joining us. We hear of people exercising their passions, whether it be in documentation, translations, advocacy, design, testing and other areas we have not thought about. As we have become more accepting of this diverse range of contributions (and some beards), it has been fascinating learning how people work together to make different contributions welcome. This has become a really interesting focus of my work: understanding how people collaborate and optimize for the nuances in that collaboration.

I have always been a firm believer that different brains naturally gravitate toward different things. As an example, in the programming sense, I naturally gravitate (my quite awful programming abilities) toward Python. My friend Dan naturally gravitates towards Perl. While our abilities are similar, my brain simply doesn't work with Perl, and his won't work with Python for a variety of reasons, including expectations, experience, technical cultural differences, and workflow. These considerations are important when assessing how communities are formed.

Part of my work has been in understanding the subtle differences and connections between different groups of people and figuring out ways to develop the potential around our findings. When we identify these similarities and patterns between different disciplines, it often leads to interesting results. A good example of this is communication: Soft-

ware developers love mailing lists, but generally don't get on very well with forums. Although there is nothing specific that excludes developers from forums, many tend to prefer mailing lists because the content is delivered directly to them. Forums are the antithesis of this ethos and instead require you to hammer that refresh button until you see new content. Knowing these nuances helps us to build better communities because we don't force contributors into boxes that they don't naturally belong in.

So far, in the Ubuntu community we have tended to some of these roles pretty well. We have a thriving community engaged in packaging, testing, documentation, translations, and advocacy, but I am particularly interested to inspire new avenues of participation. In my most immediate radar I see design and user interface testing as particularly interesting targets. Design is a very visual art-form, and designers collaborate using visual gestures and imagery.

This is just one such example of the challenges that face us, and through the following series of columns I am looking forward to sharing my experiences and thoughts on how to inspire and enthuse this new generation of free software contributors.

Before I run, I just wanted to let you know that I am really keen to hear your feedback, so feel free to get in touch with me at jono@ubuntu.com. ■

When I was first offered the opportunity to write a column, I scratched my head and wondered what on earth I should cover. The problem was certainly not a lack of ideas, but quite the opposite: There is so much going on in the Ubuntu community that I wanted to use my column as a means to showcase many of the great stories that happen each and every day. I have the pleasure of being exposed to oodles of these stories, and I can guarantee you that this is no help when narrowing something down for my column. Fortunately, it seems the topic was staring me in the face all the time, and deeply connected to all these stories: Diversity.

The Future of Participation

I first got involved in Open Source 11 years ago, and back then it was a very different place. If you wanted to contribute to the community, you were predominantly welcomed if you were a programmer. Filling these shoes had high expectations: the typically bearded individual was assumed to know how to program in C and have a strong familiarity with a range of obtuse technical tools.

While these heady days produced some incredible code and laid down the foundations of the Ubuntu we know

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[1] Jono Bacon's homepage: <http://www.jonobacon.org/>

[2] Art of Community Online: <http://www.artofcommunityonline.org/>