Pragmatic bug tracking

Alex Lambert
Moderation doesn’t work

Last year, I visited Digg and chose a random article from the front page. Then, I read the comments.
Moderation doesn’t work

This was one of the top-rated comments.

At least sixty-two people thought this comment was insightful (and not, you know, blindingly obvious.)
Moderation doesn’t work

Almost forty people felt that this comment somehow enriched the discussion.

But, who cares? It’s just an online discussion; it’s not like people are actually working on something important. (And YouTube comments make Digg look like Mensa.)

Can the depressing signal-to-noise ratio of online public discussions actually with real work?
Yes: bug tracker discussions

This was on Slashdot earlier today.
Bug tracker discussions

I visited the bug report.

Mark Shuttleworth runs the Ubuntu project, so I care about what he says.
Bug tracker discussions

Fred wrote 9 hours ago: (permalink)

Lets do it Chinese-style, rename it to Godzilla Firecox.

Fred, you’re not an Ubuntu or Mozilla contributor. I don’t really care what you have to say.

But, in the bug tracker interface, this random idiot’s comment appears just as prominently as Mark Shuttleworth’s.

This is a problem if developers, you know, actually want to discuss the issues with the project luminaries so they can get stuff done.
Esben, if you are involved with the governance of Ubuntu in some way (say, on the Technical Board), then I care deeply about this two-word comment – because your opinion will affect how this bug is ultimately resolved. I want to know what Ubuntu’s take is; if a boardmember says “drop Firefox,” that’s important.

If on the other hand, you’re some Slashdot moron, I don’t care at all.

**The thing is, I can’t tell who you are.** And, unlike on Slashdot, I don’t care about this comment in isolation; I don’t care if it’s funny/interesting/insightful/polka-dotted. I want to know your authority before I bother listening to you.

Again, in the current bugtracker, this comment looks just as important as Mark’s.
Similar issues elsewhere...

This is Mozilla bug 45375. It has 331 comments – and most are “bugspam”. The few important ones (like Ben Goodger’s) are mixed with pages of well-intentioned but useless comments (“bugspam”) from the general public. xkcd author Randall Munroe and Dinosaur Comics author Ryan North were among the many bugsammers.

The Mozilla developers have repeatedly asserted that the bugspam interferes with their efforts to fix the bug. You could debate the truth of that, but I know that as a reader the bugsspam made the report significantly less useful for me. It was harder for me to figure out the status of the fix and to understand the technical implications of the required changes.
Let’s emphasize project contributors’ comments

- This emphasis is not based on the general public’s assessment of the individual comment.
  - Remember the Digg comment moderation?
  - xkcd and Dinosaur Comics readers would have marked up the authors’ posts...even though they were devoid of any technical value

- Instead, it’s based on the user’s position in the project...roughly:
  1. Project dictator (Mark Shuttleworth)
  2. Board member (Ubuntu Technical Board)
  3. Lead developer (Ben Goodger)
  4. Package maintainer for this package
  5. Package maintainer for a different package
  6. Random user

- I personally only care about people who are at level 4 and above.
Yes, this is controversial

Internet.

Serious Business.
A prototype UI

Bug #269656 in firefox-3.0 (Ubuntu): "AN IRRELEVANT LICENSE IS PRESENTED TO YOU FREE-OF-CHARGE ON STARTUP"

Brian Curtis wrote on 2008-09-13: (permalink)  package maintainer

I cannot see how this is a bug. The notification is a one-time thing and can be closed and ignored.

William Grant wrote on 2008-09-13: (permalink)  no affiliation  hidden, click to show

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Sarah Hobbs wrote on 2008-09-13: (permalink)  release coordinator

Yeah...what is with this? Milestoning to get it on the release team radar.

rulek wrote on 2008-09-13: (permalink)  package maintainer

Brian, please allow me to explain my point of view with this.

Firstly, as William has noted, if I object or simply don’t agree to the licence what do I do? I can keep going on without in anyway indicating I accept it.

My biggest objection though, and one I think would be shared by many, is that I don’t want to sit there, study and consider the license in any detail. One of the chief attributes of Ubuntu is the licence it comes with and I don’t want to have to analyse how this effects me as a user with firefox potentially changing the licence.

If the licence of firefox in no way limits what I can do in the same way as the other software in a default ubuntu build there is no reason to show the user it.

If the licence of firefox is different and requires special consideration, then that alarms me.

Mark Shuttleworth wrote on 2008-09-13: (permalink)  project leader

I agree, this is a bug, as it’s a one-time event that can’t be closed, and the notification should be shown to the user at the appropriate time, and not the time of installation.