

Bringing together T_EX users online

From Usenet to Web 2.0 and beyond

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Outline

Classic discussion systems

Mailing lists

Usenet groups

Web based communication

Blogs, feeds and aggregators

Web forums

Advanced web applications

An enhanced Q&A site example

Comparing systems

Mailing lists

- subscribers discuss a certain topic via emails
- a server receives emails from subscribers and reflects them to all other subscribers

Benefits of mailing lists

- Can be used offline
- Run on every device with a mailreader, so also on tablets and smartphones

But

- How to really follow a huge general T_EX/L^AT_EX list?
- Do I have to subscribe to a bunch of specialized lists?
- How to find a package dedicated list if I don't even know which package solves my problem?

Focused mailing lists are great for organizations, developers, authors, less for a casual user.

Mailinglists for T_EX and L^AT_EX

- texhax
 - <http://tug.org/mailman/listinfo/texhax>
 - *The* T_EX mailing list for general questions and discussion in English language
 - Online since the 1980s
 - Hundreds of subscribers
 - Publicly archived
- About 50 further lists: <http://tug.org/mailman/listinfo>
- Specialized mailing lists hosted by various providers

Usenet

- Discussion system on the Internet, distributed by thousands servers world wide
- Articles are
 - Logically organized in hierarchies of subjects
 - Arranged in threads
- Started 1980, first T_EX group about 1990
- Requires Newsreader software
- Or access via web interfaces or mail gateways
 - google groups

Usenet groups for T_EX and L^AT_EX

- `comp.text.tex`
 - *The* discussion group in English language
 - Online since at least about 1990
 - Currently about 1000 posts each month
- `de.comp.tex.tex`
 - In German
 - Online since 1996
- `fr.comp.text.tex`
 - In French
 - Online since 1992
- `es.comp.lenguajes.tex`
 - In Spanish
 - Online since 1996

Stats: <http://groups.google.com/group/<groupname>/about>

Benefits of Usenet groups

- Distributed on many thousand servers, thus redundant
- Censoring hardly possible
- Established since many years
- A lot of experienced users
- Feature rich dedicated software

Caveat—some nice features depend on google groups:

- How can we access the archive if google stops providing?
- How to access it via web browser then?

Blogs, feeds and aggregators

There are various

- User blogs
- User group blogs
- Company blogs

Problem: hard to follow several or all

Solution: convenient access via blog feed aggregators

- www.texample.net/community
- planet.dante.de

Both offer a chronological list of posts from most T_EX blogs.

Web forums

- Discussion forums on the Internet, hosted on dedicated servers
- Articles are
 - Logically organized in categories and subcategories
 - Arranged in threads, usually chronologically
- Access via web browser on computers, tablets, phones
- Markup such as HTML, BBCode or Markdown, Code Highlighting
- Supporting attachments and inline images such as \LaTeX output
- Moderated, thus SPAM-free and some quality control

Web forums for T_EX and L^AT_EX

- `latex-community.org`
 - L^AT_EX dedicated forum covering all topics
 - Online since Jan 20, 2008
 - 7673 registered users
 - 14.087 threads containing 52.762 posts
 - organized in 5 categories with 38 subforums

- `golatex.de`
 - In German
 - With L^AT_EX wiki

- Various L^AT_EX subforums on IT and science/math forums

Challenge—building a knowledge base

Besides communication - how can we improve the content?

- Archiving
- Searching and browsing access
- Quality
- Duplicate elimination
- Cross-linking

Q&A sites

- Specialized in Question & Answer format, intended both for experts and for general user support
- Hosted on one central server or server farm
- Storing complete archive as database enriched with extra information

Example:

- `tex.stackexchange.com` aka TeX.SX
- Publicly online since November, 2010
- Now 7,200 registered users, 10,654 questions, about 19,000 answers
- All content is free under cc-wiki license, regular database dumps for download on `clearbits.net`
- Outstanding regarding features and interface

TeX.SX compared to other systems

- Strict Q&A format
- Very dynamic web interface
- Tagging: questions can be marked by one or several tags
⇒ Allows browsing by subject, filtering, feed subscribing, more search features
- Voting system: users can vote up or down a post
⇒ The best solution will be at the top, most easy to see
- Reputation system: users earn reputation score if other users vote up their posts
⇒ Community moderation: the more reputation the more moderation features are available for the user

TeX.SX compared to other systems

- All posts can be edited by the community, wiki-like,
⇒ Higher quality, mistakes can be corrected and answers can be improved
- Duplicate control: every user can mark occurring duplicates
⇒ Path to the best solution, automatic FAQ system
- Database exploring: the database dump can be browsed by SQL queries online
⇒ Statistic features, complex queries can filter and connect content and attributes
- Open API ⇒ Programmers developed many apps for various special purposes, also for Android and iOS

	Usenet	Web forums	TeX.SX
Usability	Reading, writing	✓	✓
	Markup, graphics		✓
	Attachments		✓
	Deleting own posts		✓
	Community deleting		✓
	Self editing		✓
	Community editing		✓
Interfaces	Native web access		✓
	Articles, Blogs		✓
	Tool-tips		✓
	Assisted editing		✓
	Feeds	✓	✓
	Twitter posts		✓
	Chat		✓
	Statistics		✓
	Open API	✓	

		Usenet	Web forums	TeX.SX
Availability	Redundancy	✓		
	Archive on Server	✓	✓	✓
	Full public archive			✓
Quality	Accepted solutions			✓
	Community voting			✓
	Dupe elimination			✓
	FAQ extraction			✓
	Community edits			✓
Moderation	By moderators		✓	✓
	By the community			✓
	Mods are elected			✓
	Meta & mod site			✓

		Usenet	Web forums	TeX.SX
Content access	Full text search	✓	✓	✓
	Topic categories		✓	✓
	Quality sorting			✓
	DB queries			✓
Filtering by	Topics		✓	✓
	User-defined terms	✓		
	Consensus score			✓
	User score	✓		

Conclusion

- For discussion, Usenet groups, mailing lists, and web forums are great.
- For content building, dedicated sites with proper free license are recommendable.

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