

GNOME Community Voice

Sri Ramkrishna

Introduction

Hi, I'm Sri Ramkrishna

GNOME old fart, been part of GNOME since late 1997.

Started off doing GNOME Summaries and then morphed into a project called GNOME Journal which merged into the new engagement team around the time of GNOME 3.0 release

Been doing outreach for quite some time

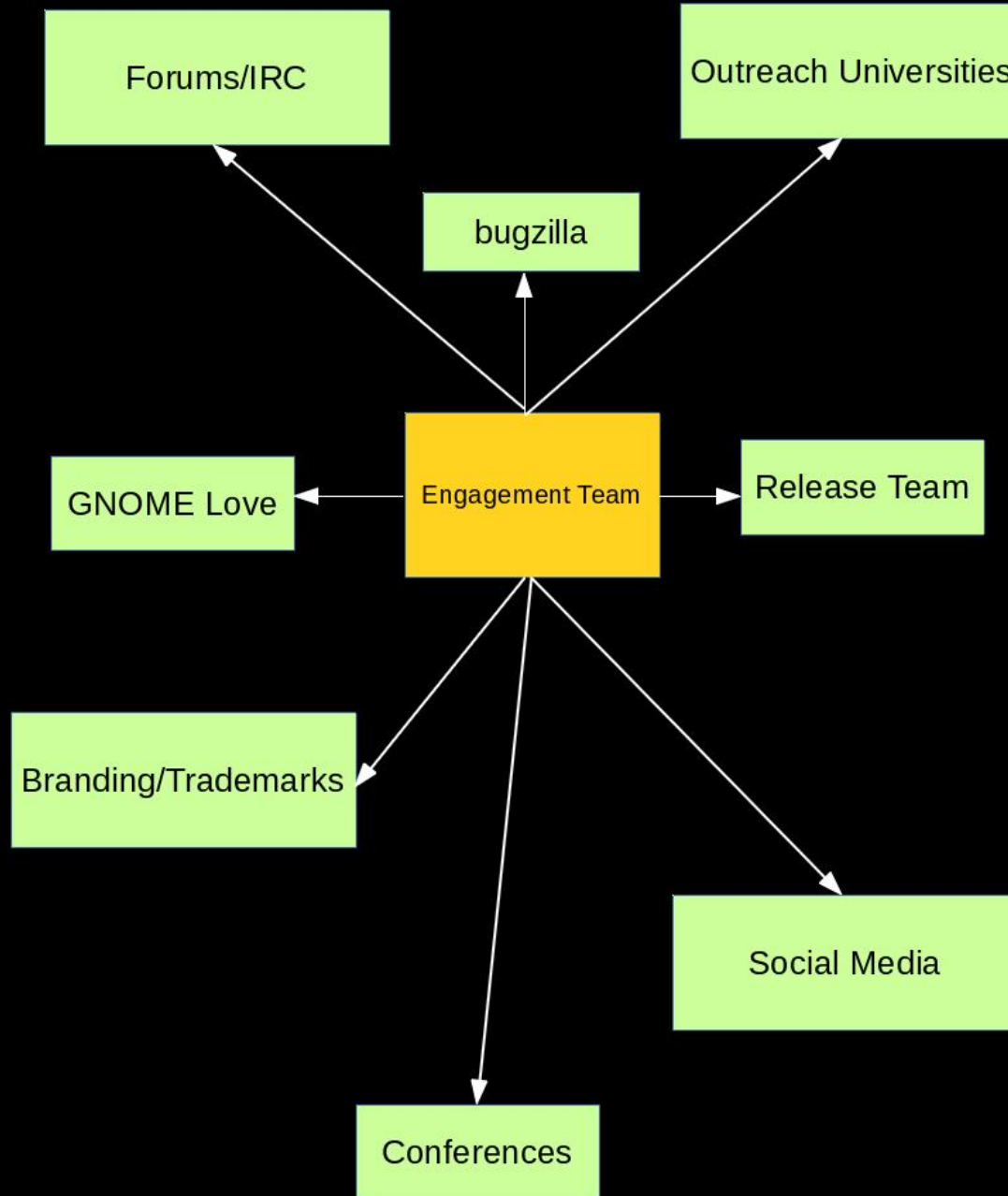
Outgoing GNOME board member after two years on the board.

What are we going to talk about today?

The title of the talk says 'community voice' and my intention is really how can we have more community involvement in our project, attract more community? This talk is about a proposal to move engagement more central to GNOME development and integrate community voice into GNOME, with the idea that engagement team represents both GNOME and community within the project.

OK - why reorganization? What's the problem?

Engagement team is currently in my opinion is bolted on at least in how it works with the project - meaning, while we work with the board and web developers, we don't really work with developers. So, I want to move the engagement team more centrally, more visible as part of GNOME development. The integration will help the project to better deal not with the public at large, but also give the community itself a voice within GNOME that meaningful and useful and not full of noise



Bugzilla

We frequently have a lot of dustups in bugzilla. Users or developers come in with some issue or feature request that for one reason or another is rejected which of course creates a series of follow up comments of outrage.

Why does that happen?

I think that people fail to understand how a feature gets implemented or bug gets fixed in GNOME. Arguably, GNOME is a complex eco-system and adding or subtracting something from the platform is something that must be carefully considered. I think this is something a lot of people don't get.

I think it is harder to get something integrated in GNOME than say the kernel. The linux kernel has an architecture that lets you easily write all kinds of features that doesn't necessarily step on each other. We can write many filesystems, schedulers and so forth and they can easily be accepted after a certain amount of iteration, but that iteration is mostly on making sure that code is of high quality.

In GNOME, a feature has to be carefully considered in the context of the entire design. You're talking about something that interfaces with users of wide backgrounds, and you don't want to break the design, and introduce an inconsistency. The kernel does not have to deal with the human dimension at all which any sociologist or anthropologist will tell you is quite complex.

What we need to do is document what we expect from users or developers who file bugs, supply patches, or ask for features.

Despite that, we are still going to see conflict, and I would encourage module maintainers to bring in an engagement team member to step in and deal with with an errant user who clearly doesn't get it.

The last comment I would make on this, is that we should be respectful to the people who file bugs, it isn't easy to file bugs against GNOME because it really requires you know the pieces of GNOME to file against.

Release Team

The release team has been going through their own set of changes, but one thing we had discussed in last year's GUADEC was that the engagement team should be involved before something gets released. This is to make sure that we fully understand if there are regressions or features that might create some friction in the community. There has been instances in the past when we've released software with changes that could be considered controversial. I am not advocating that engagement team has any kind of veto vote, but it does give an opportunity to be able to create messaging that will address the issue before a possible blow up.

Presentations / Outreach

As you've heard from Christian Hergert's talk, GNOME is not just a desktop it is an eco-system. GNOME is not afraid to go to the right component on the Linux stack to fix an issue. There isn't a linux system that doesn't have GNOME technology in it, there isn't a blu-ray/smart tv that doesn't have GNOME in it. But a lot of what we do is not recognized.

It is imperative that we have a presence at every conference, we need to setup a calendar. I would like to see developers do either two things, give the talk about particular area of expertise e.g. application sandboxing, or give the technical details that someone else can write the talk, (e.g. CSS theming in GTK+) for instance.

Let's get out there and show what GNOME is doing, and what we are offering to the Linux eco-system.

Linux conferences are not the only ones we should be presenting at. We need to break into new markets, so automobile market, IoT (Internet of Things), and someone mentioned medical devices. Heck ya!

If we want to get new contributors, we need to start giving talks at Universities I know that a lot of companies are interested in more students who have open source experience. Emerging markets like IoT requires open source experience and there are not enough developers to do that. Let's harness that need and get them working on the GNOME project.

Volunteer capture

Volunteer capture, I've touched upon in last year's talk. We really need to change the mechanism on how we get volunteers in, and really analyze how we can get people quickly working. We had talked about bugzilla, earlier, and I think we should changing how developer files bugs, by creating profiles - easy, medium, hard so that it can easily be captured in a report and people can easily work on.

I'm reasonably sure that if we I sent 20 volunteers to GNOME, that there would have a hard time getting themselves integrated.

Our developer documentation is pretty good, but we probably need more examples and it needs to be tested against the latest. Which means, that we should probably have our examples tested against gnome-continuous in some way. Make sure they are working against the latest and greatest. Right now, the samples that we have documented are bit-rotted. That sucks.

We should transform our home page into something awesome, that reflects the energy and culture of GNOME in a very visual appealing style. We reach out using our values. People should know that GNOME isn't just a desktop but a something worth joining as a community because of compatible values. That means that the new design is community oriented and less about the desktop.

Sandbox

This is something I have been thinking for a long while. Back during the early days, the bar of entry of coding into GNOME was really low. As our code base matured, and more and more people and organizations are relying on it, the more conservative we are when introducing changes. The thing is, upcoming young students do not have the maturity to deal with the social and technical engineering. After all, students in university are not trained to work with a team. So let's lower that bar, create a branch called 'Sandbox', and hook it up with gnome-continuous.. make some simple rules 'dont' break the build', don't break the abi/api of the libraries your modifying. You get back an image, a tangible result of your work, that you can show off publically.

By allowing people to able to just work on a library and commit whatever ideas, we give them a chance to at least invest their time in GNOME without having to iterate over and over. When GNOME started, we had developers who were nine years old, 13 years old.. that would not be possible today. Today our young folks are GSOC or Outreachy interns who have a monetary incentive that mitigate having to learn the eco-system on their own. Let's make GNOME fun again, let's introduce that fun chaos and put some fun back into our project.

Community metrics

Finally, we need to measure our community. We need to start collecting metrics that measure our community. These metrics need to lead to something actionable. What do we want to measure? Sure, we can do we want to measure how many gnome-love bugs are. Sure we can do the usual git stats, but what would be interesting to me is, how many people that weren't maintainers submitted a patch into bugzilla. Who were those people? What are the active bugs in GNOME? What new designs were added this week? What new feature was integrated?

Every week, the engagement team needs to go over the metrics. Asking itself, how is our community going? Why are the number of gnome-love bugs not going down? Without the review, it will peter out like every other metrics project. The metrics needs to be something that the project needs to coalesce around.

Metrics continues to drive purpose. What we would be limited with is the lack of resources. The engagement team is pretty small.

Winding down...

So, to sum up, I'm asking that we coalesce around community building as a project. By bolding arranging ourselves around initiatives that will lower the bar of entry across the project. We need to increase our communication within the community and outside the community. Community cannot be just something that rests on one team, we need to make community a first class citizen next to development. I'm asking that we seriously look at how we can make engagement a central part of how GNOME does development.

If you're excited about this like I am, come speak to me or attend the Engagement BOF tomorrow!

One final note, all of us should be invested in outreach and engagement. This isn't something for just the engagement team to do. We all own our part in the success of growing our community.

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