Hubbub - An innovative customer support forum

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With thanks to Dr. John Davies for delivering this presentation
Agenda

- Background on customer support fora
- Hubbub technical details
- Current Status
- Results
- Future plans
Background

- Internet forums go back a long way
  - 10-15 years ago
- Bulletin boards (e.g. UBB, VBB) were popular at the time
- Initially were informal communication spaces but began to be used as support tools for various businesses (e.g. Microsoft TechNet, Apple, …)
Most of the forums are:

- Category hierarchy based
  - Forum -> Sub forums
- Browse and read user journey
  - Browsing the content to select topic to read
- Scattered content
  - Two related and relevant posts might be in two different forums
Issues as support tools

- Traditional forums focus more on engaging users in communications, not specifically on user support.
- Difficult to find relevant information.
- Difficult for novice user to get help.
- Also true for current forum solutions like Lithium/RightNow.
Business background

- Converged communication products
  - Multiple interacting systems
  - VOIP - network, client software, VOIP server, PC hardware and drivers, modem, ...

- Support challenges
  - Users unable to articulate problem
  - Boundary of responsibility issues
  - Low price ⇒ pressure on support costs
New concept

- “Ask question first” user journey
  - Direct to content rather than browsing
  - Focus on supporting users rather than general discussions
- Maintain the social network
  - Interest registered
  - Notification mechanism
Hubbub

- As a forum that focuses on solving customer problem
- Let users help themselves
- Diversion from contact call centre
- Net centric
- Question answering system
User journey

- Users type in their problem (title and a summary of problem)
User journey (cont.)

- Keywords are extracted from that problem
  - User can refine the keywords set
- Relevant discussions are retrieved based on this set of keywords and presented to users
User journey (cont.)

- If no solution can be found, the problem can be registered as a forum post so that others can reply to it.
- User can subscribe to keyword/post/user.
- Users will be notified via email if a new post matching their interests is registered or somebody else replied to their problem.
User journey (cont.)

- Inappropriate posts (containing banned words) will be automatically banned and can only be lifted by a BT moderator

- Users can flag posts as offensive

- Users can browse and read posts
  - but not category-based
Technical details

- Open source components
  - Apache
  - PHP
  - MySQL
  - Smarty
  - OpenSSO
Cost effective

- Easy to setup
  - Need one hosting machine
  - Import existing FAQs
  - That’s it, ready for use

- Easy to maintain
  - Low ongoing costs
  - Just need to ensure server is up and running
  - Have only restarted the server once between Sep 07 and Jan 08
Status

- Support channel for BT Softphone since June 2006
- BT Softphone status (January 08)
  - 5,500 users
  - 41,000 queries
  - 12,000 posts
    - Implies 29,000 queries did not require new post
    - 950 marked as solved
    - 11,000 either have no solution or not marked by user
    - 6,000 posts had at least one reply
  - 300,000 unique IPs
  - 5,000 real requests per day, excluding search bots
(Beejaycee) Tuesday October 31

Thank you LisaC -
Following your instructions I found that my webcam was not selected against 'devices' as soon as I selected my webcam and clicked 'Apply' a picture appeared in the webcam window.

Problem Solved.

(Drossafone) Wednesday November 03

RESOLVE the TIME Problem BY DOING THIS:-

Log into Hub Manager and go to Advanced (ID admin PW admin)
Switch to another user
Click on Configuration then Configure
Under Time Configuration, tick the box that says Auto Configuration
Ensure the Time Zone is UTC
Enter TIME.WINDOWS.COM in the Time server 1 box.

That's it.

(1uk3) Wednesday October 04

Brilliant!
Thanks very much for the solution - I've been looking for ages!
Similar approaches

- [http://www.getsatisfaction.com](http://www.getsatisfaction.com)
- Commercial
- 200 companies
- 30,000 posts
Similar approaches (cont.)

- Microsoft Office Live
  - Cover Office products
  - Limited experience

- Hubbub
  - Adds ability to refine search (change keywords)
  - Support for Web 2.0-style community
Customer Benefits

- Reduces dissatisfaction with help desks, no call waiting or handling times
- 24/7 free customer support. Customer can ask a question whenever they want
- Permanent record of solution, no need to call back if answer is forgotten
- Solves unsupported problems e.g. non-BT equipment
- Puts customers in touch and builds a community within a BT safe environment
BT benefits

- Reduced helpdesk costs
- Increases utilization of call centre agents (contribute to Hubbub in downtime)
- Identifies common customer issues early
- Database of solutions to problems
- Free, up to date and accurate customer research and feedback
- Connects the product manager directly to the customer
- Builds a network and community of users which in turn reduces churn
Future

- Integrate workflow management
  - Distribute work to agents if community cannot respond
  - Skills and reputation based distribution

- Recommendation system
  - Personalisation based on history of reading and posting

- Learning system
  - Intelligent keyword recognition
    - Better keyword suggesting
      - E.g. Softphone <-> virtual phone
Conclusion

- New trend towards question answering for customer self help system
- Effective support tool
  - Benefits for BT and customer
  - Est. saving of £300,000 per month (£7 per call)
- Could evolve into a more complete work management system

- [http://hubbub.labs.bt.com](http://hubbub.labs.bt.com)
That's it!

- Thank you for your attention
- Questions?