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LibreOffice User Documentation: Successes and Challenges

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LibreOffice

Today's Talk Will Cover

- The documentation team
- Objectives and goals
- Materials produced
- Production
- Distribution
- Challenges
- Wish list
- Priorities
- Group discussion

The Documentation Team

- Small group of active contributors
    - Jean Hollis Weber (team leader)
    - Peter Schofield (Draw & Impress Guides)
    - Hazel Russman (copy editor)
    - Dan Lewis (Base Guide)
    - John Smith (Writer Guide)
- Larger group of occasional contributors & advisors, including Martin Fox (Calc) and Andrew Pitonyak (macros)
- Input from translators and others
- Initial group (early 2011) mostly gone or inactive

Objectives and Goals

- Produce & distribute documentation to support end-users
    - Timely
    - Accurate
    - Task-oriented
    - Suitable for the audience
- Assist other groups within LO
    - Help, website, marketing
    - Certification
    - Developer docs, installation, etc.

Materials Produced

- User guides (PDF, ODT, printed)
- Tutorials, howtos (wiki, video, other)—mostly on the wish list
- Blog
  - Announcements (new & updated docs)
  - Help wanted
  - Tips, hints, tutorials
  - Links to other info
- Docs wiki—mainly distribution of user guides & other docs

Achievements

- Rebranded OOo user guides
- Improving books as we update them
- Sales of printed books
- Distribution through Ubuntu as well as LO sites

Production

- User guides produced using LibreOffice, exported into other formats (PDF, print, ebook)
- Drafts & published files stored on ODFAuthors website
- Wiki used for planning & tracking
- Mailing list used for communication, planning, tracking
- Considered:
  Wiki as primary source; create PDFs etc from wiki
- Most English docs are original, but we are moving more into translating from German, French, etc.

Distribution

- Published files (PDF, ODT) stored on wiki, with links from website; free to download
- Printed copies produced & sold by Friends of OpenDocument through Lulu.com (profits from sales used for LO)
- PDFs sold through Ubuntu Software Center by Friends of (profits from sales used for LO)
- Publicised through LiboDocs blog, personal blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Google+

Challenges: Summary

◤ Not enough people with time & skills

◤ Always behind with updates & improvements

◤ Keen but clueless volunteers take a lot of time

◤ No one available to mentor new volunteers

◤ User guide template too book-oriented

◤ Little or no technical review of content

◤ Some people do too much pedantic nitpicking of details while overlooking technical accuracy

Challenge: Attract, Mentor, Keep People

- Need good instructions to get people started
- Need a docs roadmap?
- Need "easy hacks" for user docs?
- "What's in it for me?" (how to reward and keep people)
- How to convert the "keen but clueless" into valuable contributors?
- Training in technical writing / peer reviewing / translating
- Some people want to work independently (good); others want "assignments" and supervision (time consuming)

Challenges: Keeping Up & Quality Assurance

- Not enough people to keep user docs up to date with pace of software development
- No one to do technical reviews
- Not enough time for review and editing
- Volunteers need to learn to use the software

Wish List

- **External (delivery)**
  - Provide info in more formats & more types of docs/videos
  - Provide info tailored for specific audiences: students, academics, businesspeople, publishers, scientists etc.
- **Internal (production)**
  - Researchers, bloggers, mentors
  - Reorganise Docs wiki
  - Easy hacks for Docs
- **Produce shorter, stand-alone items for wiki, blog, ePubs (possible publishing through O'Reilly)**

Discussion Topics

⬛ How to do more, better, faster?

⬛ What should be our priorities?

⬛ How to find, recruit, mentor volunteers?

⬛ How to reward and keep people?

⬛ How to use social media to help produce, promote, distribute information?

Some Notes from Community Leadership Summit

- Volunteers need tangible near term benefits
- Need to see real people doing real things right now
- Create a powerful vision & show direct relationship of work to that vision
- Identify & integrate offsite material (supplement what we produce)
- Don't let tools become a barrier
- Be specific in requests
- Announce what we're working on

More Notes from Community Leadership Summit

- Check mailing lists & forums for people and approach them directly
- Major reward is attribution (recognition). Put names of major contributors at top of list
- Other rewards: training in technical writing / peer reviewing / translating; learning to use the software efficiently; have fun
- Adopt a user guide, or a chapter, or a wiki page
- Find/write/commission at least one blog article a week—
  OK to link to external articles
  (need someone to coordinate commissioning)

Thank you … any questions?