



M3.12 Assessment of user support services, with the refinement of subsequent milestones

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Work package: WP3 'Training, outreach and community support'

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1. USER SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Within VIBRANT, Scratchpads is a data-publishing framework for people to create their own thematic virtual research communities supporting biodiversity science (<http://scratchpads.eu>).

The Scratchpad platform provides at present the following support systems for users:

- the help desk dealing with all emails, issues tracker, calls and meetings relating to user support;
- a help system with help pages integrated into the individual Scratchpads;
- the sandbox and home training sites for self-training;
- training courses with training manuals (manuals available online);
- a blog to inform the community on new features, fixed bugs, training courses etc.

Support systems play an important role for the communication between users and developers of software. The following paper has been published in Zookeys: Brake I, Duin D, Van de Velde I, Smith VS, Rycroft SD (2011) Who learns from whom? Supporting users and developers of a major biodiversity e-infrastructure. In: Smith V, Penev L (Eds) e-Infrastructures for data publishing in biodiversity science. ZooKeys 150: 177–192. doi: 10.3897/zookeys.150.2191. In the paper two Scratchpad support systems, the issues tracker and the email service, were studied in detail. Full text can be viewed at:

<http://www.pensoft.net/journals/zookeys/article/2191/who-learns-from-whom-supporting-users-and-developers-of-a-major-biodiversity-e-infrastructure>

The aim was to identify co-learning opportunities between users and developers of the Scratchpad system by asking which support system was used by whom and for what type of questions. The results show that issues tracker and emails cater to different user mentalities as well as different kind of questions and suggest ways to improve the support system as part of the Scratchpad development.

2. USER NEEDS

To get a better view of user needs and to improve the further development of Scratchpads 2.0 as well as implementation priorities, a user survey has been set up. The survey covers the following issues: Scratchpad community characteristics, system improvements, training courses, technical support services. The user survey is online at <http://www.qualtrics.com>.

The focal maintainers (± 350) of all Scratchpad sites were asked to fill in the online survey. The request was sent out on 9 September 2011 with a reminder on 6 October 2011. At the time of writing this report, 53 surveys were fully completed.

Most of the responses received are very positive with valuable suggestions and comments on the support systems and for Scratchpads software development. An evaluation of the results of the user survey will be dealt with in the subsequent milestone: M3.14 'Assessment of user support systems and promotional activities' due for M24 (November 2012).

3. AMBASSADORS NETWORK TO FOSTER LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

In order to promote Scratchpad use and to foster long-term sustainability of the Scratchpad community, the ViBRANT project launched the Scratchpad Ambassador programme. WP3 is recruiting a select group of Scratchpad Ambassadors to be the official local representative of the Scratchpad community, linking the Scratchpad team with Scratchpads' growing user base.

Ambassadors spread the word about Scratchpads, promote the use of Scratchpads and arrange or give training in their local Scratchpad community. Ambassadors are our point of contact person for Scratchpad users in their taxonomic community, and in that way they help the Scratchpad team to better understand the needs of users, so that the Scratchpad developers can keep improving Scratchpads.

The programme and the ambassadors network can be viewed at:
<http://scratchpads.eu/ambassadors-programme>.

4. REFINEMENT OF SUBSEQUENT MILESTONES

Concerning refinement of subsequent milestones, there is no need to change or add milestones as M3.14 will perfectly encompass the work to be done and the expected output for Year 2.