BeVolunteer Annual Report 2013-14

1. BoD report: Short overview of main activities and milestones

1.1. BW website & members

- there were roughly 20.000 new members (69171 on 31st October 2014, 50382 on 1 November 2013).
- 27962 inactive members (not logged on for 365 days or more) have again been contacted in May 2014 and 26906 profiles have been set to inactive ('out of remind')
- New Terms of Use started to be effective in January, thanks to the excellent preparation and explanations given we have had no complaints and not many questions to answer.
- We have had a server failure in May and have subsequently moved servers. Two meetings with sysadmins have been hold to produce an emergency plan, in order to prevent such a scenario to repeat itself.

1.2. Bevolunteer organization

1.2.1. BoD

- very enthousiastic beginning, many optimistic plans end 2013
- decision was taken to have **public BoD meetings**, whenever it's possible - most of the time there was a private part in the beginning to deal with sensitive issues like BV applications; in the end of the legal year this **decision was partly reverted**, since each BoD meeting was attended by different 'new BW members' and only hours after the meetings, whole passages of the chat log had been published on the internet in order to ridicule, discredit and bully BoD members as well as volunteers; the BoD then decided to open meetings only to volunteers.
  - **resignation wave** in the first BoD 2013/14 for different reasons (personal - organizational, see eGA http://www.bevolunteer.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2014_eGA1_Minutes.pdf)
- only 2 people of the BoD were left to organize the extraordinary General Assembly
- **interim BoD** (wind + claudiaab + BV members to help out
- **new BoD** (claudiaab, railslide, wind) had to deal with several problems: missing volunteers and team coordinators, setting up new sysadmin team
- **Emergency plans** for BW site being offline were developed together with new sysadmin team and interested volunteers
- first BoD introduced **new procedures: proposals** - the idea was to reduce discussion time during meetings and just have quick votes. Discussion should have taken place in advance (in the BoD group), but in reality no discussions took place; in general the idea is worth considering, especially for bigger BoDs, but then all BoD members have to make sure to give feedback to the proposals in the BoD group;
- **checklists** for several BoD issues were started in the wiki to facilitate new BoDs and handing over information and procedures from one BoD to the other

1.2.2. BeVolunteer members

- **extraordinary General Assembly** (minutes: https://www.bewelcome.org/wiki/Minutes_eGA1_2014)

- as a result: many supportive BV members turned active: 2013: 50 BV members, 16 active, 27 supportive, 4 friend --> 2014 eGA: 60 BV members, 35 active, 25 supportive, but subsequently a lot of active members turned supportive again (currently 60 BV members 22 active, 37 supportive, 1 friend)
- short period of high activity in BeVolunteer during eGA was followed by inactivity when it came to taking over tasks (especially volunteer coordinator) – in general too many tasks are handled by too few BV members
- only **4 new members** joined in 2014, unfortunately one member resigned

1.3. Finances

- Yearly donation goal of 3,410 Euro for running our website was reached within 7 months.
- We got one donation of 700 Euro and one of 740.57 Euro, without these would have been difficult to reach the goal.
- We receive most donations by Paypal, where we need to pay high fees.
- When the donation bar is not visible, only few donations are given.
- The 800 Euro for the review of the privacy policy by a lawyer were not used.
- We budgeted 2000 Euro for server equipment, but less than 1300 Euro were used for this.
- The money from the BeActive campaign was not used and is still available in the next year.
- The BoD made a proposal to adapt the rules of the BeActive campaign, this will be discussed during the online part of the GA and then be voted.

2. BeWelcome Volunteering

Volunteering can be seen as key issue for the future of BeWelcome. During the last year we have hardly had any new volunteers and at the same time several long-time volunteers stopped. New volunteers are needed in almost every area of BeWelcome to ensure the continuity of BeWelcome. Without new volunteers no new BeVolunteer can be recruited and with a small membership base in BeVolunteer, it is not so likely to find a minimum of 4-5 BoD candidates.
The first BoD of 2013/14 saw the urgency of this and designated three volunteer coordinators. Unfortunately all three resigned only two months later. The second BoD of 2013/14 had to focus on filling the legal positions and decided to look among BV members for volunteer coordinators outside the BoD. However, even after long exchanges with candidates, in the end none of them was willing to take on this key position.

2.1. Software Develeopment Team and Testing Team

Major changes to the code

A code cleanup is ongoing to remove all legacy code. Additionally the following bigger features were inroduced:

- Terms of use update (including visibility changes for the different user statuses)
- Advanced text search options
- New mail handling
- New forum search possibility (removing Google custom search)

Number of volunteers that have contributed to the code and to discussions

- Six people submitted code during the last year.

Problems in the infrastructure (server, certificates etc.)

- Currently none.

Bottlenecks

- The project lacks developers and testers.

The testing team is effectively dead at the moment.

Welen Project

The Welen Project stopped beginning of 2014.

2.2. Sysadmin Team

- There are currently two active sysadmins and several backup sysadmins.
- After the server crash we switched servers.
- Moving away completely from ecobytes is still on the to-do-list
- There is now a good plan for emergencies and an emergency list that has been shared with several active volunteers of different teams.

2.3. Forum Moderators Team

- **Disclaimer:** Since the Moderation Team (Mods) have no access to statistics about the number of threads, posts, reports and edits, the following numbers and figures are based on manual calculations. However, we feel these figures are quite accurate.
- Since the last report at the previous General Assembly (GA), the Mods have been contacted in **171 topics/threads**. This involved about **350 - 450 reports**. Some topics (threads and/or posts) produced a single report, some others produced many reports, and finally some were discussed among the mods without receiving a formal report from members. Roughly estimated, around 40% of the reports were spam or inappropriate posts, around **30% were posts that needed admin action** because, for instance, they were in the wrong group, around **20% were personal attacks**, and most of the remainder were differences/quarrels between members, often reporting each other. The Mods took action in slightly more than half of the cases, leaving the rest as they were (with an explanation).
- This activity was not evenly spread over the year. Periods when little action was needed other than the odd commercial post alternated with spikes of controversy on the forums and difficult mod decisions. Most of the controversy involved the **behaviour of a few individuals** but the team found it necessary to escalate sanctions against these individuals over a very short period, **up to and including a ban**. This, in turn, provoked a debate about the role of the Mod Team and moderation versus free speech. The Mod Team participated in this debate and would welcome **greater clarity about what members agree is or is not acceptable in mod intervention**. Unfortunately, this debate was not satisfactorily resolved, perhaps because there is no general agreement amongst the membership, and the Mod Team has had to continue with the practice of 'consensus interpretation'.
- The **suggestions process** was introduced during the year, raising issues for the Mod Team. These issues have been of policy (what level of moderation was appropriate for the suggestions process and whose responsibility was it?) and technical (some of the moderation tools available in the forums are not available in suggestions). Some practical workarounds were agreed but these are not completely satisfactory and moderation of suggestions threads may again become an issue if activity levels pick up again. Hopefully, this will be addressed in the current review of the suggestions process.

- During the last period, we had to impose **forum moderation bans on two members**. One member was banned for one month (after receiving the usual warnings and lighter bans). The second member received a year ban (after receiving the usual warnings and lighter bans). In both cases the motivation for imposing these bans was the failure of the members to stop breaking forum rules a 1 (no personal attacks), a 5 (follow Mods advice and decisions) and b 1 (no trolling)
- This year we welcomed one new forum moderator. Presently there are officially 8 Mods, of which 6 can be considered active. During normal activity, 4 active forum moderators are enough. However, in times of conflicts it can be good if at least 6 are active.

2.4. New Member Bewelcome Team report

- **Statistics:** 5873 unique members have been added to our lists. Since some profiles have been removed before we greet them, and some are doubtful, we will probably reach 5800 soon (still working on August list)
- We have **8 volunteers** in the team
- Making the new lists is technical and is done by 1 person at this moment. A tool should be coming soon, at least we have seen some screenshots of it.
- The experiences are very positive overall. Sometimes we receive messages back, most of the time it's people thanking us for the welcoming and the info we give them. The good thing for BeWelcome is that dubious profiles are seen by us and forwarded to the safety team.
- We have 2 groups: a public and a private one. The private one is used to discuss detailed procedures, links to workrelated pages, the tools and other info which can be important to the team. The public one is to raise awareness of the application-procedure and to provide common information to the rest of BeWelcome.
- The application procedure is documented in the wiki of the public group.
- Spanish is a language that we see a lot, where we don't have a native speaker. We could use some more motivated volunteers, since the workload is mostly done by the same.
- BeVolunteer could raise awareness of the existence of the team, of the application procedure (on get active page)

2.5. Support Team (01/10/2013-30/09/2014)

Statistics

- o **Number of tickets:** Between 1 October 2013 and 30 September 2014 we received **1,176 tickets in total** (previous year: 1,362) which makes an average of **3.2 tickets a day** (previous year 3.7). This number does *not* include bounces from login and voting reminders (another 650 messages), feedback when members delete their profile (250), spam and training tickets. It does however include the "confidential queues" which are not handled by the Support Team. Excluding those, the team handled **859 tickets** (and these will be used as the basis for the following statistics).

- o **Languages of tickets:** Most requests are in English but we regularly receive requests in French, Spanish, and German. We have an extra queue for French and Spanish tickets which helps the respective volunteer to answer more quickly. We received 80 messages in French and in 51 messages in Spanish. German requests have no extra queue, so we have no statistics about them. We also, from time to time, get requests in Dutch, Portuguese, Italian, Russian, and Turkish.

- o **Languages spoken by active team members:** *English (all), French (5), Dutch (4), German (3), Italian (2), Spanish (2), Swedish (1).* Our biggest bottlenecks is currently Spanish (since one of the two volunteers speaking Spanish became inactive during the year). Tickets in other languages are usually machine translated and answered in English.

- o **Response times** (time to first response for 859 tickets)**:**

Compared to previous year, **response times have doubled** and were 119 hours (the annual report last year showed a response time of 70 hours but this number included the confidential queues which are not handled by the Support Team; the average response time for the Support Team was 60 hours).

Detailed response times:
- 16%/139 tickets were closed without response (no reply was needed - members can tick a check box if they just want toreport something but don't require a reply)
- 27%/231 tickets were replied to within 24 hours. (Cumulative total: 370, 43%)
- 20%/176 further tickets were replied to within 72 hours. (Cumulative total: 546, 63%)
- 14%/122 further tickets were replied to within 1 week. (Cumulative total: 668, 78%)
- 10%/88 further tickets were replied to within 2 weeks. (Cumulative total: 756, 88%)
- 5%/41 tickets were still unanswered at the time of this report (24/10/2014)
- 6%/49 further tickets were replied to within 1 month. (Cumulative total: 846, 98%)
- 2%/The remaining 13 tickets were replied to within 3 months. (Cumulative total: 859, 100%)

Generally speaking, standard questions that did not require any specific rights/language skills or very detailed knowledge that only a few volunteers have, were usually answered within 1 week. Most other questions were answered within 2 weeks. 12% of all questions took longer than 2 weeks to answer.

Response times have clearly deteriorated during the last year. The main reasons were probably:
- Several team members became BoD members which reduced their availability for the team.
- A previously very active team member has repeatedly been inactive for long intervals during the year.
- Another previously active team member who mainly answered Spanish questions became inactive.
- Not a single new member joined the team during the whole year (see section "Volunteers" for details).

Types of questions

Currently we use the following categories (number of questions per category for the past year in brackets)
- Account (411)
- Board of Directors (15) - new queue, confidential, not handled by Support Team
- Forum moderators (33) - confidential, not handled by Support Team
- French (80) - questions of all categories
- General feedback (86)
- Media (22)
- Other (55)
- Safety and abuse (268) - confidential, not handled by Support Team
- Software issues (81)
- Spanish (51) - questions of all categories
- Suggestions (61)
- Volunteer (13) - **this no. was 137 in the previous year!**

Volunteers

The "Support volunteers" group has 39 members. 14 members have access to the Support Team queues (not including the confidential queues "Board of Directors", "Safety and abuse" and "Forum moderators"). Out of these 14 members, **11 have been answering support tickets** in the past year. However, to make the real workload per person more transparent:
- 59 % of all tickets were handled by 2 volunteers alone
- 29 % were handled by 4 additional volunteers
- 8 % were handled by the remaining 5 active volunteers
- 5 % of all questions have not been handled yet.

The group has two team coordinators, one of which is currently taking a break.

Of the 11 active team members during the reporting period
- 1 left the team completely;
- 3 became inactive (no tickets handled within the last 3 months of the reporting period);

o   1 more is currently taking a break.

This leaves the team with 6 active team members at this time (one of which answers media questions only, another one French questions only, leaving the "general team" with 4 active members).

Several BeWelcome members applied for the team in the past year, only very few actually started the training phase and no one finished it. This means, the team has not managed to acquire any new members at all.

New templates and procedures

We created a few new templates and added some ticket queues to better sort incoming messages.

Open tasks for the coming year
o   Acquiring new active team members to increase quality of service and response times
o   Finding a new second team coordinator (to replace the currently inactive one) who has time and motivation to organize the team and to make sure it grows again

What can BeVolunteer do for the team

The last year saw a lot of downtimes for OTRS. Although in last year's report BV was asked to take care that OTRS is moved to a new server this effectually took a very long time and was one of the reasons for the many downtimes. Also, since the move to a new server, OTRS has not exactly been stable. It would help a lot if BV took care to secure a stable server situation.

The other main problem during the last year was a lack of volunteers (due to the loss/inactivity of previously active members and no replacement for them). Generally speaking the report shows that volunteering for BeWelcome has become significantly less attractive during the year. BeVolunteer should analyze the reasons for this and take appropriate and tangible measures to secure the long-term functioning of all BeWelcome teams.

2.6. Safety Team (01/10/2013-30/09/2014)

Team

The team had 6 members until mid-January and 5 members since. For the work load of the period this team composition is considered adequate.

Statistics

- **Number of tickets:** Between 1 October 2013 and 30 September 2014 the Safety Team received 268 tickets. This is a decrease of -22% vs. the 345 tickets of the previous year and pretty much the average of the past two years, while at the same time the membership increased by more than one third. 227 + 34 duplicates/follow-ups = 261 have been analyzed below (the remaining 7 seem to be merged duplicates).
- In addition to these tickets the Safety Team also dealt with and deactivated profiles created for the purpose of spamming before these could create problems and generate tickets.
- Because of the varying nature of safety tickets requiring more or less consultation within the team a meaningful analysis of response times is not possible at the moment. Especially the urgent, safety related issues (se below) were dealt with swiftly, however.

The vast majority of cases, 86 of 227 (38%) were profile issues, mostly profiles not of real people but profiles created to advertise commercial offers, and 1 member under 18 years.

38 cases (17%) concerned spamming of members via message, posts or blogs (certain spam posts were classified under Online Disputes).

28 cases (12%) related to profile comments, a large percentage from a spammer using the comment feature.

22 cases (10%) were about issues with using the website.

16 cases (7%) were classified as online disputes (either via exchange of private messages, or in groups or the forum) reported to the Safety Team.

8 cases (3.5%) were <u>real-life disputes</u> of members interacting face-to-face.

4 cases (1.7%) involved <u>sexual misconduct</u>.

29 tickets (13%) were opened or moved to the Safety Team queue <u>without relevant reason</u>, mostly spam sent to the safety team address and some testing.

6 cases had several different complaint reasons.

Of all reports to the Safety Team, only 8 (3.5%) concerned actual safety issues in the sense that the safety of members could be at risk.

33 cases (15%) were about disputes between members, or between a member and BW volunteers including the Safety Team.

186 of 227 cases (82%) were not related to safety issues or disputes, in part because they were dealt with before a dispute could develop, notably through quick banning of commercial profiles.

The team is pleased with the low number of reported issues which could have put members at risk and with the absence of any serious abuse case but remains vigilant and ready to act if such cases should be reported in the future.

2.7. Legal Team

- recently started with Libertedeparole as coordinator, but the team still needs to be set up

2.8. Communication Team

The following Communication Team report looks back on the previous year (between General Assemblies), suggestions for the future have been collected in a wikipage https://www.bewelcome.org/wiki/Suggestions_for_improving_the__Communications_Team_2014

Introduction

The communications team works within the overall strategic choices made by the Board of Directors (BOD) and BeVolunteer (BV) and their recommendations for marketing and communications objectives.

Generally, there is no shortage of communications team volunteers. There are currently 141 members in the communications team. However, few are active. Each member is at the moment a lone operator. Two team members have recently taken on the responsibility as team coordinators, thorgal67 and subaculture, but the coordination still has to gain momentum.

The workload system currently depends on a person coming up with an idea, promoting it and gaining support. Often, ideas come and go, without completion if there is a lack of motivation and action.

The primary means of internal communication is through the newsletter. These 'newsletter' updates are not as regular as expected in the past year, given a falloff in volunteers and a lack of 'news' to communicate. There also needs to be a discussion as to whether newsletters are effective. Maybe technical analysis of click-through rates are important.

Also collaboration with translators is sometimes problematic because the newsletters are often very long and require a considerable effort from translators (we have had problems finding translators available for some "key" languages this year.

Recent Newsletters:

- Upcoming – BeWelcome November NewsLetter 2014
- BeWelcome June Newsletter 2014
- BeWelcome November Newsletter 2013
- BeWelcome October Newsletter 2013
- BeWelcome July Newsletter 2013

However, work needs to be done on creating a Newsletter template, rather than having volunteers argue as to what are suitable topics. This is important, as each new volunteer has different opinions as to what is 'news.' (Template discussion: http://www.bewelcome.org/forums/s11408-newsletter__technicalities)

The communications team also uses the front-page 'community news' (which is only seen if members log in to the site). Community related News have been quite slow in the last year, as it was difficult to know what is news, and what kind of news is suitable or allowed.

Marketing

The main job of the communications team is to put out messages about BeWelcome (BW), its activities, tools and its core values. While BW has relied on Word of Mouth (WOM) since 2007 to attract new members, it has not led to critical mass, and has limited adoption in many regions and countries outside Western Europe. The communications team with BOD support seeks to amplify WOM, by taking BW message to new offline/ online channels that are relevant to BW members and nonmembers. This is called Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM).

Many communications team members, whilst volunteers, could use their experiences in marketing, but sometimes have not sought to use these experiences or have not found the proper channels to work within. For many members, 'marketing' may be a dirty word; and not worthy of BeWelcome. However, even the most benign non-profit markets itself for particular purposes (build membership, fundraise, create awareness).

Example: Some members find the use of Facebook distasteful and seek withdrawal or severe restrictions. Using such channels must be seen as normal practice within BW and not as a threat.

The team continues to support members and non–members who wish to communicate about BeWelcome though BW posters, Flyers and Badges, Get Buttons, a Promotion Kit and press support.

Over the previous twelve months, there have been increased mentions of BeWelcome.

3. BeWelcome Meetings and Unconferences

- Unfortunately the planned big event in France (Monnai-revival) could not take place after all.

3.1. Lisbon hackathon 2013-14

- a couple of volunteers gathered in Lisbon for several weeks, mostly to give the Welen project (complete reprogramming of the BW site with symphony) a boost; unfortunately in the end the Welen project was dropped;

3.2. Unconference Lyon, April 2014

- about 25 participants came together in Lyon to discuss several aspects of local communities. https://www.bewelcome.org/groups/1799/wiki

3.3. Cork

- Over 50 people attended the Cork hospitality camp https://www.bewelcome.org/activities/643

3.4. Seek The Duck - Toulouse, July 2014

- 30-40 people participated
- It was a success and didn't take lots of organization
- Hopefully next year somebody will continue organizing it

3.4. Mont Royal

- 150 - 200 people
- smaller than previous years due to short notice and nearly no advertisment in any local groups.
- It was fun like always, this year some people even organised and transportable sauna. Also, we have from year to year more children coming.
- The ninth version will definitely happen next year, question is only when.

3.5. BeActive

- of 3 eligible candidates in the end none claimed any money:
- Lisbon hackathon: since Welen was dropped and the main Welen programmers resigned, they decided not to claim the BeActive money.
- BW banner for BW community Düsseldorf: Since the activity for which the banner was to be used did not take place (lack of participants and bad weather) and no subsequent event was organized, the funds were not claimed.
- BW banner for BW community Lyon: The unconference was a success, the banner was useful and used, a report exists but in the end neither the report nor receipt and bank connection were sent to the BoD to claim the money; We suggest that if this is done in the new legal year, the money should still be paid.
- evaluation:
  - problematic to have a deadline in winter when less activities are organized
  - rules are a bit too strict, ruling out any costs for food is not so practical when it comes to hackathons and workathons, abuse can be prevented by setting maximum costs for food per person per day
- --> new proposal for BeActive, see GA agenda

4. Conclusion

This year we had to struggle with several major problems on an organizational as well as on a technical level. We ended up cleaning the mess and tried to set things straight for the future. However,

major effort has to go into gaining more support from both BeVolunteer members and BeWelcome members. Recruiting and managing volunteers and also recruiting new BeVolunteer members to actually have a really active membership base will be a key factor for the next year.