

Collaborium.NET Portal of Open Source Software

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Abstract

The Science and Technology (S&T) Collaborium initiative was born with the aim to: “*help sustain economic competitiveness and scientific and social progress*” for developing countries. With this goal in mind, a new S&T Collaborium.NET web portal is proposed. With Collaborium.NET we want to offer the concrete possibility to do business for (and among) developing countries using open source. Open source offers a great opportunity for developing countries to use the last and most advanced IT technologies for sustainable development for free. We want first to create a community of users; second, to involve more volunteers from western countries in the IT field; third, to encourage companies willing to do business with developing countries. Starting with a complete set of web portal services with guidelines for issues such as networking, web development, e-commerce, etc... , users from developing countries will have the opportunity to ask for services or create services by themselves with the virtual guidance of other commercial companies and/or small and medium enterprises (SME).

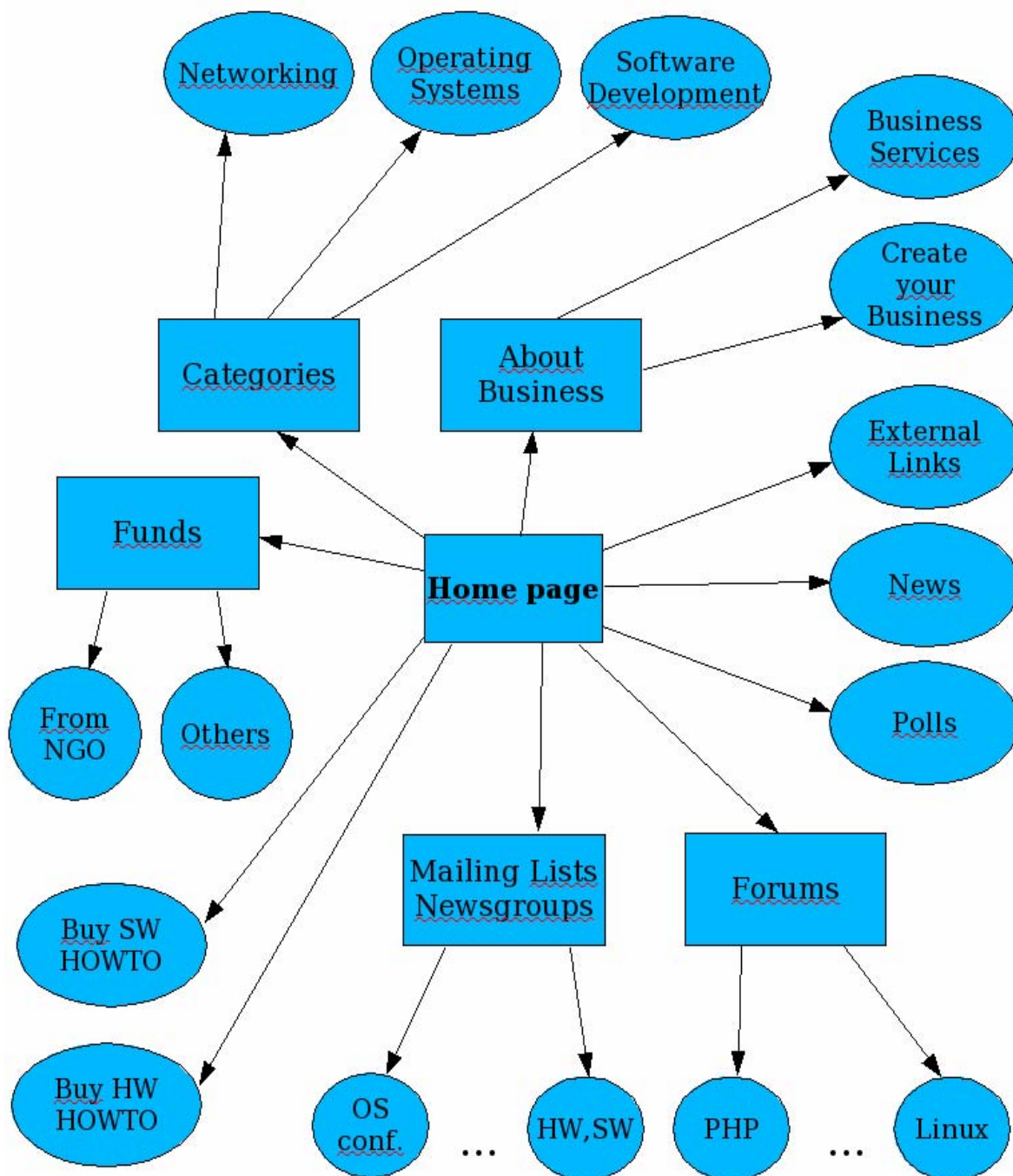
Open source communities

Digital Divide is a big open problem. A lot of aspects must be resolved, including lack of infrastructure, awareness and skilled people. Another aspect to consider is the possibility for people from developing countries to understand what open source is, what it can do for them and how to use virtual communities to know about new technologies, learn them and then finally implement IT solutions based on open sources. Typical on-line communities collect manuals, HowTo's and papers divided by categories. They host forums on special topics, Newsletters, Mailing lists, Chat rooms. Newbies (or new Internet users) can have problems just because too much information on the net is not organized enough, or simply because they are not skilled enough to use such information. Collaborium.NET wants to offer a starting point for newbies, mainly, but not only, coming from developing countries.

Access point to communities from developing countries

Collaborium.NET wants to cover necessities and interests of a wide range of people, *from “dummies” to “gurus”!* A good set of information must be present inside Collaborium.NET, but another important issue is to give the correct reference for special requests (such as links to other communities, forums, etc). A better solution would be to have a community that normally uses Collaborium.NET, but it is very important to merge also with other communities. Once on the Internet, existing communities are really open to everyone and one example is the Open Source Portal of UNESCO at http://www.unesco.org/webworld/portal_freesoft/about.shtml
The resources needed to join communities along the lines are *small*.

The General Picture



From “dummies” to “gurus”

From the user's skills point of view, the main objective for Collaborium.NET is to be able to help people allowing them to move from “dummies” to “gurus”(at least a few of them). Information is to be collected by level of knowledge needed to understand and to use it in an optimal way. Every user will be guided to the correct *path of knowledge*.

Tools like forums, newsgroups, chat rooms will connect different users with different skills. Newbies will be able to grow resolving practical troubles. To achieve a dynamic and highly-visited virtual community is one of our main objectives. No fee will be charged to be part of this community, but all participants can receive help thus giving a good reason to continue to use the community's services.

On-site Training to help Science development and dissemination

S&T Collaborium has carried out on-site training since 1st January 2000. This initiative is a *spin-off* of the Abdus Salam ICTP training activities and Collaborium.NET wants to improve it collecting information needed to plan, organize and manage on-site training. Everyone interested to do an on-site training can read information on the web-portal, and a preliminary request can be submitted. Collaborium.NET in collaboration with S&T Collaborium Initiative at www.collaborium.org will do the planning steps, figure out the type of event needed (workshop, school, hand-ons ...). It will propose when to organize the training (and look for Collaborium volunteers availability) and will search for funds and people to organize the training.

A NET of Volunteers and Professionals

S&T Collaborium involves a few volunteers (today less than 10). Usually phone calls and e-mail exchanges have been sufficient to contact all of them to manage new on-site training and all the related organizational issues. A bigger community of Volunteers and Professionals will need a special section of the web portal to manage suitable data. Tools like newsgroups and forums are needed to discuss about new on-site trainings, both for the management and for the training content.

A different organization is needed to manage longer activities like monthly schools. A different tool is required to cover the functionalities needed to manage this class of activities.

A proposal is the CDSagenda 5.0 (actually current version is CDSagenda 4.2 developed and used by CERN in Geneva and Abdus Salam ICTP in Trieste). This will be ready in 2004 and will be able to manage the planning of all S&T Collaborium trainings. A map of training can be depicted on-line.

Every organizer will manage his own training, adding all needed information about the management, activity's contents, etc. Users (volunteers) will be able to see all planned trainings, join one of them (giving their availability), ask more details and suggest topics, according to personal skills. On the other side, every user will be able to compile a personal profile, writing down a list of skills. Full details on participants selection may be included.

Business, open source and developing countries

Another business is Business itself. Adding business services to this kind of web portal via the Collaborium.NET is not easy and must be done with care. First it must be done to help people when no other possibility is available; for this reason it must be studied when and how to add contents to guide people to business services. For example, it is necessary to consider:

- How to let people request the correct service for the correct need?
- How to define prices for these services?
- How to make a service available after a request is received? (sustainability and scalability).

Collaborium.NET will study how to add this possibility in the most effective way, including it into the portal as soon as the community grows and the need raises.

Help make business

Another big step is the possibility to help people making new business in developing countries to exchange data with their peers around the world. The aid of a community could be important for the success of personal initiatives, institutions, universities or NGOs. The creation of new companies and the use of e-commerce inside developing countries would contribute towards the creation of cheaper services. Different aspects must be studied:

- How to make a contact from a new initiative inside developing countries with Western companies willing to open business with, or inside developing countries?
- How to help people finding funds from countries or NGOs?
- How to help Western Companies to receive funds from their countries to do business with developing countries?

Those are big issues and must be explored during the creation and the growth of the Collaborium.NET community.

We hope to offer all these concrete possibilities to the benefit of developing countries with the new Collaborium.NET web portal under development, and with the use of open source technologies.