

Overview of lobste.rs, a technology-focused link aggregation website.

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August 10th 2018

Introduction

- ▶ Lobsters is a computing-focused community centered around link aggregation and discussion.
- ▶ Accounts are available by invitation only.
- ▶ It is similar to though with fewer readers than Slashdot or Hacker News.
- ▶ As of June 2018 we see 12-15k unique IP addresses every weekday and have 6k invited and active users.

Alan Post

- ▶ I own and operate Prgmr.com, an Internet hosting company.
- ▶ I will sell you a Linux machine with a public IP address. Our smallest plan is \$5/month.
- ▶ My favorite feature is our Secure Shell (SSH) to serial port management console.
- ▶ Prgmr.com, Inc. founded in 2005 by Luke Crawford.
- ▶ I purchased a majority of the company in October 2016.
- ▶ I'm the systems administrator for lobste.rs. Prgmr donates the hardware for the site.

Software Features

- ▶ a tagging system to categorize and filter submissions,
- ▶ a user invitation tree to combat spam,
- ▶ downvote explanations to curb reflexive downvoting,
- ▶ a strong commitment to transparency.

History

- ▶ Website came online July 1st, 2012.
- ▶ It was created by Joshua Stein (jcs) after he was shadow banned from Hacker News.
- ▶ In September 2017 jcs gave the site to Peter Bhat Harkins (pushcx), who assembled the team that now runs the site.
- ▶ In February 2018 we held a fundraiser to officially adopt the new lobster emoji in support of the Unicode Foundation.

Source Code

- ▶ website code: <https://github.com/lobsters/lobsters>
- ▶ ansible playbook:
<https://github.com/lobsters/lobsters-ansible>
- ▶ This source code is licensed under a 3-clause BSD license.
- ▶ It is both Free Software and Open Source.

Software

- ▶ Nginx.
- ▶ Ruby with Unicorn.
- ▶ MySQL.
- ▶ Postfix.
- ▶ Ansible.
- ▶ Ubuntu.

Ways that people participate and contribute

- ▶ Reading.
- ▶ Submitting articles.
- ▶ Writing comments.
- ▶ Inviting new users.
- ▶ Freenode IRC channel, `#lobsters`.
- ▶ Sharing links to lobste.rs on their websites or other social media.
- ▶ Fixing bugs reported in our ticket system.
- ▶ Adding features to the codebase.
- ▶ Talking about the website.

Invitations

- ▶ An invitation is a sign of approval.
- ▶ It is acceptable to ask for an invitation.
- ▶ On IRC, we ask for an introduction. Your name and any or all of your personal website, links to your portfolio, or your resume.

Volunteers

- ▶ 1 BDFL.
- ▶ 2 Systems administrators.
- ▶ 3 moderators.
- ▶ 4 IRC channel operators.
- ▶ 71 patch contributors over the lifetime of the project.
 - ▶ over 2 dozen in the past year.
- ▶ We have 14 open tickets tagged “good first issue.”

IRC

- ▶ We have 3 official channels: #lobsters, #lobsters-boil, and #lobsters-feed.
- ▶ We have around 300 users in #lobsters, with approximately 150 actively conversing in July 2018.
- ▶ In the past year we've hosted approximately 1,000 visitors.
- ▶ Our channel bot, mockturtle, announces new story submissions from the website and provides other channel services.

Compute Resources

- ▶ lobste.rs is running as a Xen DomU.
- ▶ It is allocated 2 vCPUs, 6GiB RAM, and 30GiB disk.
- ▶ Over the past nine months, compute resources have scaled linearly with traffic.
- ▶ Scaling the community is more difficult than scaling the compute resources.

Support

- ▶ With desktop software, if it breaks you get to keep both pieces.
- ▶ With a web application, if it breaks you don't get to keep either piece.
- ▶ We have both proactive monitoring and work on user-reported issues.

Organizations

- ▶ Our DNS domain is registered with CRI domains (<https://cridomains.rs/en>), who donated our first year of service.
- ▶ Our official chat channel is hosted on Freenode.
- ▶ Our HTTPS and SMTP TLS certificate is provided by Let's Encrypt.
- ▶ Story submissions are mirrored by the @lobsters user on Twitter.
- ▶ Our site backup is done with Tarsnap (<https://www.tarsnap.com/>).
- ▶ Our source code repository and ticket tracking system are hosted by GitHub:
<https://github.com/lobsters/lobsters/issues>.
- ▶ Prgrmr.com donates hosting: CPU, disk, memory, and bandwidth.

Sister sites

Other than lobste.rs, several sites have forked the lobsters code and run sister sites:

- ▶ Barnacles (<https://www.barnacl.es/>).
- ▶ Le Journal du Hacker (<https://www.journalduhacker.net/>).
- ▶ Write.Narwhal.Space (<https://write.narwhal.space/>).
- ▶ Barnaclad (<https://barnacles.blackfriday/>).
- ▶ CryptoBuzz (<https://cryptobuzz.io/>).
- ▶ Impct (<https://impct.io/>).

Sister sites, continued

Other than lobste.rs, several sites have forked the lobsters code and run sister sites:

- ▶ Whistling Lobsters (<https://lobsters.obormot.net/>).
- ▶ Kind and Green News (<http://news.kindandgreenworld.com/>).
- ▶ Gh Tech Roundup (<https://ghtechnroundup.com/>).
- ▶ G33kz (<https://g33kz.de/>).
- ▶ Tildeverse (<https://links.tildeverse.org/>).

Noteworthy Alternative Communities

- ▶ Hacker News (<https://news.ycombinator.com/>).
- ▶ Reddit's /r/programming (<https://reddit.com/r/programming>).
- ▶ Slashdot (<https://slashdot.org/>).
- ▶ 4chan's /g/ (<http://boards.4chan.org/g/>).
- ▶ Mastadon.

Closing

Lobsters is an invitation-only computing-focused community.
Any questions?