



Erasmus Mundus Students & Alumni Association EMA

EMA IT Team Annual Report 2007-2008

Introduction

As the IT Team Annual Report, this document details the activities and tasks undertaken by the IT Team over the period from October 2007 to May 2008. It also summarises the future plans and initiatives of the team currently under development.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the members of the team for their enthusiasm and contributions. Special thanks also go to the Steering Committee and the Service Provider for their continued support.

Taghi Paksima
Vice President, IT Team Coordinator
EMA

Summary

Since the first EMA GA in October 2007, a major task the IT Team has been involved in has been the planning and the arrangements for the launch of the new EMA Community Website. These activities have included coordination with the Service Provider during the technical requirements, test phase, deployment, and bug reporting. The community Portal was launched in January 2008.

In an effort to improve quality and productivity of the team it a call was launched to recruit new team members with more technical

expertise. Service Teams' web presence is another task the team has been working on.

Another important initiative has been the provision of IT Services for EMA chapters and (at a later stage for) EMMC alumni associations. We have been trying to develop a framework under which EMA would be able to provide an online platform for the chapters' web presence.

We've also been working on a few other tasks such as developing an IT Policy for the association, improvements to member profiles on the website, and providing technical support for the requirements of the Steering Committee.

Mission

Collaborating with the other EMA Service Teams, the IT Team endeavour to provide the front-end platform for the EMA community, as well as the required electronic infrastructure for the services to be offered by the other teams, with the EMA website being its focal attention.

Since EMA is an association with its members residing and relocating with vast geographical distribution, we consider the EMA website as the association's office, hence giving it special priority.

It has been our utmost effort to bring together all possible technical services and features for the association. The redesign and redevelopment of EMA website has been a major step forward, thanks to the service provider. To this end, we are committed to our endeavour to provide the users with the best possible experience, and to provide them with a collaborative platform to efficiently communicate and contribute to the EMA community.

Team Members

The IT Team currently consists of six members:

Taghi Paksima (Team Coordinator)

Colin Bate

Marta Ziemienczuk

Jeremy Durand

Jules Dake

IT Team Activities 2007-2008

1. IT Team Meetings

The following are the meetings the IT Team have had from October 2007 to May 2008:

November 5th, 2007 – Teleconferencing
December 3rd, 2007 - Teleconferencing
January 25th, 2008 - Teleconferencing
March 4th, 2008 - Brussels

2. EMA Community Portal

Since the first EMA GA in October 2007, a major task the IT Team has been involved in has been the planning and the arrangements for the launch of the new EMA Community Website. These activities have included coordination with the Service Provider during the technical requirements, test phase, deployment, and bug reporting. The EMA website is the major service EMA is providing, with the Community portal being the focal interface for interaction with and among members. The Community Portal was finally launched in January 2008 after unexpected delays. For the test phase of the system the IT Team asked a number of users from different stakeholder groups to help during the phase. These included the IT Team, the Steering Committee members, two people from the Commission, and testers from the Service Provider. Unfortunately apart from a few people from the IT Team and the Service Provider no feedback and support we received from others. This left the IT coordinator with no choice as to put a hold on the phase, and request the Service Provider to thoroughly check the system. There were numerous inconsistencies in the implementation both before the release and afterwards. These included (and still do in some cases) issues in the user interface, functionalities, missing feature and so forth. Detailing the problems is outside the scope of this document, but are mostly available on the Team wiki and internal documents. There are still outstanding technical issues with the Community Portal that we are following up with the Service Provider.

The IT coordinator suggested a face-to-face meeting between the shareholders, especially the IT, the Service Provider and the SP's sub-contractor, to discuss the outstanding issues. We have so far been unable in mutually arranging this meeting. We are looking into arranging a meeting after the GA 2008.

3. EMA Public Website

The EMA public website was launched just before the GA 2007 with many of the features deployed later in the year. Again the IT was involved in specifying the requirements and ensuring the quality of the final system. Currently we have on our agenda to re-organise the contents and the structure of the public website.

4. Email Accounts for Team Coordinators

To provide the Steering Committee with a consistent and professional medium for correspondence, appropriate email accounts were arranged to be created for each of the Service Team coordinators with a standard format as serviceteam@em-a.eu. *All these email accounts were delivered in December 2007.* The system currently supports POP access and provides a web mail interface based on the Open Source system "Axigen". We are looking into possibilities of providing IMAP access as well for the next term.

Mailing lists were also created for each of the service teams to collectively address the team members. The format is: serviceteam.team@em-a.eu such as it.team@em-a.eu. These mailing lists are to be used internally by the team only and are not publicly advertised.

5. Premium Wiki

In order to provide the teams with a suitable yet easy-to-use online collaboration platform, it was decided to create independent wikis for each of the teams and more importantly for the Steering Committee. After investigating a few options, PBWiki was used for this purpose. Wikis were created and credentials were sent to team coordinators. The IT provides technical support for these wikis which have proved to be very useful to the teams. Sub-domains were also arranged to be created for each wiki as: serviceteam.em-a.eu, all with URL masking enabled.

6. Skype Business Premium

To address the problem inherent to online teleconferencing using free services such as Skype, we proposed to have budget allocated to use a premium service. The most economical solution at this stage was Skype Business Account. We set up a business premium account with Skype and 1000 Euros were allocated to this purpose of which only 200 Euros have been used to this date. This business account allows the Steering Committee to call in participants who are unable to be online or have a proper Internet connection on their landline or mobile phones. The account is centrally managed by the IT Team coordinator. The budget is managed through the Service Provider.

7. Team Organisation & Productivity

Four new team members joined the IT Team at GA 2007, joining me and Colin Bate from the previous term. Out of the six members only Colin and I come from a technical background. On the other hand some of the team members have been mostly inactive with regard to their contributions due to their personal engagements. This induced excessive load onto the coordinator and was further compounded by my responsibility as the Vice President since February 2008. To address this problem and in order to make the IT Team more productive it was decided at the LG meeting in Brussels in March 2008 to launch a call for expression of interest to join the IT Team. The call was published on the website in February 2008 and four applications were received from members with some relevant expertise as stated in the call. We will decide to recruit these applicants after reviewing their applications with the new team after the GA 2008.

8. Online Profiles for Service Teams' Members

We have had the intention to provide online profiles for all service team members in order to introduce them and their activities within the teams to all members. The design of these profiles has been drafted and will be finalised with the IT Team after the GA 2008. We also intend to motivate Service Teams to have a more active online presence. This issue was also among those discussed in the IT Team meeting during the LG meeting in March 2008.

9. Member Forwarding Email Addresses

Forwarding email addresses for all members was a service launched at the end of the previous service provider's contract. Because the service was launched hastily towards the end of the contract we experienced many problems. For example there was no keyword checking in place for creation of the forwarding addresses by the members. So one could create an email address as president@em-a.eu. With the new service provider arrangements were made to port all the old forwarding addresses to the new system under the new domain name em-a.eu and to fix the known problems. However in the meeting in March the IT suggested to put hold on the launch of the service in order to investigate possibilities of using a different domain name for the forwarding addresses. With an eye on future growth of the EMA we thought it might be better not to have it under the main domain name. Once decided by the IT, this service will be launched in the next term (2008-9).

10. Online Voting

Online voting has been something we have had on our first agenda in 2006. The pressure came with the onset of the preparations for the GA 2008 and the need to provide equal opportunity for all members to vote rather than the ones participating in the GA. However as unfortunately the EC had not allocated any budget for this despite being on the IT agenda and proposal we could not deploy a solution in time for this GA. Together with the service provider a few solutions were looked into. The options are still open and due to be decided by the IT Team for the next term. An approximate budget of 5000 Euros have been allocated for it in the new budget proposal to the Commission for the next term.

11. IT Services for Chapters & EMMCs

This major initiative of the IT Team which was launched in LG meeting in Brussels in March 2008 aims to provide IT services to EMA chapters and (at the next stage) to EMMC alumni associations.

The intention is to develop a framework under which we can offer web presence services to chapters as a package. Some of the ideas at this preliminary stage are to provide: domain name, web hosting,

dedicated email accounts/service, webs services such as photo gallery, forum, wiki, voting and many more.

We have requested for a budget of 10,000 Euros for this purpose which is yet to be approved. I anticipate this budget will allow us to provide an infrastructure to enable us to provide IT services to about 10 chapters in the next term with the capacity for growth thereafter with further smaller budget allocation.

Future Plans & Initiatives for 2008-9

The following section summarises some of the initiatives we are planning to deliver for the next term 2008-9:

- IT Services Framework to provide web presence services to EMA Chapters and EMMC associations.
- Forwarding email addresses for EMA members
- Definition of the IT Policy
- Improvements to the website, especially the Community Portal
- Improvements to the member profiles
- Online polling
- Online voting
- Improvement to the Careers/Jobs section