

Thoughts on Joomla!



Open Source Matters. Why?

My favorite conversation starter at Joomla events used to be, “Tell me your Joomla story.” Everyone in the community has one. How did you learn about Joomla? How do you use it? How has Joomla affected your business or your life? Why are you at this event? What are you hoping to learn? Who are you hoping to meet?

These days I have a new conversation starter, “What is Joomla?”

Depending on the crowd, I get a jumble of answers centered around the concepts of content management and web creation tools. There might be a little debate about the CMS versus the framework. Not too far into the conversation someone will suggest a much better answer.

Joomla! is a community.

This answer generally elicits at least two objections.

1. Most members of the community came to Joomla through the superior benefits offered by the CMS. This observation is often followed by a conversation of the unique technical features available in the core of Joomla (MVC structure, multilingual, 2FA, etc.). These are things that every good web developer knows the world should care about... Joomla as a CMS is just plain better.
2. The second objection to the idea of “Joomla as community” is that lots of global brands have communities. This objection actually helps to make my point. Joomla doesn’t have a community; Joomla *is* a community.

Even the two most similar offerings in the CMS space miss out on this point. Drupal and WordPress both have large and impressive communities. Acquia and Automattic are both responsive to their communities. It is good business. Yet, these corporations exist first to serve their shareholders. It is important to keep this in mind [when the next Tumblr goes up for sale](#). How is that acquisition serving the WordPress community? How is it serving the corporation? How long before Automattic is itself acquired or goes public? How would a change in ownership impact the community and what it values? Why does any of this even matter?

Communities are built on shared values.

[Drupal has stated values.](#) They are like Joomla's but seem to focus more on ways of behaving. They tell you how you should do things rather than why you should do them. The stated Drupal values are more about verbs than nouns.

If Wordpress has a values statement, I am not able to find it. [They do have a philosophy](#) and they state their support of [the Four Freedoms](#) as their Bill of Rights.

Joomla is a little different. For my thesis, all the building blocks already exist within Joomla. [The stated mission, vision, and values of Joomla](#) ALL speak of the importance of community, collaboration, and volunteerism. The logo is four people interlocked in a shared sense of purpose. The [very name Joomla speaks](#) directly to collaborative effort - [All Together](#).

Why getting this right matters.

[Simon Sinek](#) has become borderline cliché in marketing circles. He says that we should start with “why” rather than “what” when thinking about and discussing our endeavors. You might not yet be aware of his thoughts on this. A quick viewing of [the best TED talk with the worst recording quality ever](#) is worth the next 18.5 minutes of your life.

If I apply Sinek's formula of the “golden circle” to how to think about Joomla, it goes like this:

1. What - [Joomla has an award winning Content Management System](#). Joomla also has a PHP framework, user groups, global and local events, an online magazine, free online documentation, a huge extensions directory, and much, much more.
2. How - Joomla volunteers work together to create powerful online tools. The tools make up a secure, flexible, easy-to-use platform for building beautiful websites.
3. Why - Joomla is a global community of volunteers that believes Open Source Matters. The world is a better place when people are open, transparent, respectful, and collaborative in their work.

The Joomla community seems to rarely think or talk about the “why” of step 3. It is there; it is hanging out in the background. However, it is clearly there. The name (Joomla), the logo, the name of the underlying legal entity (Open Source Matters), the mission, the vision, the values... these can't all be an accident! They all say the same thing over and over.

Now. Pause. Clear your head for a moment. Let's turn it around. Let's lead with “why.”

1. Why - Joomla is a global community of volunteers that believes Open Source Matters. The world is a better place when people are open, transparent, respectful, and collaborative in their work.

2. How - Joomla volunteers work together to create powerful online tools. The tools make up a secure, flexible, easy-to-use platform for building beautiful websites.
3. What - [Joomla has an award winning Content Management System](#). Joomla also has a PHP framework, user groups, global and local events, an online magazine, free online documentation, a huge extensions directory, and much, much more.

Please tell me you hear and feel the difference.

Bonus round.

There are at least two more significant benefits to orienting our thought process toward a community-first agenda. Those benefits are:

- Place values over conduct.
- Provide a clearer and more flexible roadmap.

Values over conduct.

The first benefit is that a community focus addresses in a positive way what it means to be a part of Joomla. We can lead with our Values instead of our Code of Conduct. We create and embody a culture that is striving for what is best for the community. Someone can still behave in a way that is inconsistent with the values of the community. However, now it is a slight to *their* own integrity as a contributor to Joomla rather than breaking someone else's rules (the CoC).

Codes of Conduct are like legal contracts. They are helpful in stating how each party should behave. They also state how deviating from those expectations is handled. However, like a legal contract, by the time a Code of Conduct is enforced, everyone has lost out on the big picture. There are no winners in a Code of Conduct enforcement procedure.

I do not want to be naive about the challenges inherent in changing culture. I do believe that **we can start** by focusing more on the shared values of our community.

Roadmap.

We are fortunate to live at a time when each moment feels more significant than the one that preceded it. Drupal is right to value an embrace of change.

One of the problems with focusing on the CMS as our raison d'être is that it creates circular logic for the development roadmap. How do we improve the CMS? Well, let's look at what we are all about. What is that again? Oh yeah, we are here to make the best CMS possible. How do we improve the CMS? Do you see the circle?...

In that frame of mind we can argue about UX, features, code structure, (etc.). We risk doing so without a solid basis for making value judgements about what is “better.” If we are a community that values and deliberately focuses on...

- Freedom
- Equality
- Trust
- Community
- Collaboration
- Usability
- Transparency

...we have an external measuring stick for value judgements. We also have a clear sense of the decision making process. The correct answer is not, “what do you think?” but rather “which available option best serves the values of our community?”

At first glance these values seem too esoteric to apply to decisions about code and development. Yet they have been a crucial part of Joomla design decisions from day one. These principles exist in everything from MVC and namespacing to how Joomla handles GDPR and 2FA. These technologies aren’t just features; they serve people. They serve a purpose and they reflect values - our values.

Even further?

I want to take the flexible roadmap even further. If we focus on the CMS as our primary identity we will only ever have the CMS as the way to best live out our shared values. If the community is our primary identity we can create whatever we want to best live out those values. The tools become subservient to the values of the community. We build our identity around our beliefs rather than our output.

Joomla has [historical context for this roadmap flexibility](#). It aligns the effort behind [Joomla as CMS](#) and [Joomla as framework](#).

Looking forward, there are untapped open standards that could dramatically improve life online. Social media *does* exist outside the walled gardens of Facebook and Twitter. Protocols like [Activitypub](#) are powering new decentralized online communities ([mastodon](#), [fediverse](#)). [WebRTC](#) creates new avenues for video conferencing that doesn’t care what OS you are running. Good implementations of these open standards could address real online pain points. Even email could stand to be re-decentralized.

Should Joomla run out tomorrow and set up a team to establish the Joomla social media network? Should Joomla create a video conferencing solution? No, but we could. My point is that the community is not constrained by the CMS as to what it can create. We can choose the best tools and platforms to live out our shared collaborative values. The CMS is not our

operating system, the community is. [We just happen to have the best free CMS on the planet](#) as an output of that community OS.

The role of leadership.

Does the focus on community change how we understand leadership? I see the Joomla leadership role as three-fold.

- Leaders are stewards of the assets and resources entrusted to their care. Those assets include finance, code, websites, (etc). The most important resource in their care is the effort of community members. It is a classic example of servant leadership. Leaders constantly ask, “How can I best help others succeed in their roles?”
- Another important aspect is the actual role of the leader. Every effort should be made to leave things better than they were found. We win elections and lose elections gracefully. The measure of a leader’s success is creating a robust competitive clamoring of successors willing to bring new energy and ideas forward during the next election cycle.
- **The primary role of the leader is to create an environment where other community members can flourish.** Leaders are stewards of the core values. Members are affirmed and supported so that they can work together to share their best creative efforts with each other.

These roles seem obvious, but it is a shift from focusing on the output of the community (the CMS) as the highest aspiration of our leadership. The CMS is a crucial, but trailing indicator of success. Instead leadership focuses on the health of the community as the highest goal. If we get the community part right, is there anything we can not do, with excellence, working... “All Together”?

I want to conclude with a word of gratitude for all those that have walked this path ahead of me. My involvement in the community is an expression of that gratitude. For nearly 15 years volunteers have been paying it forward and showing the world a better way to collaborate online. If you have been part of that contribution, you know who you are and you know what you have sacrificed to make ~~the internet~~.. the world... a better place.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

The future is open. The future is community. The future is - all together, Joomla!

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