

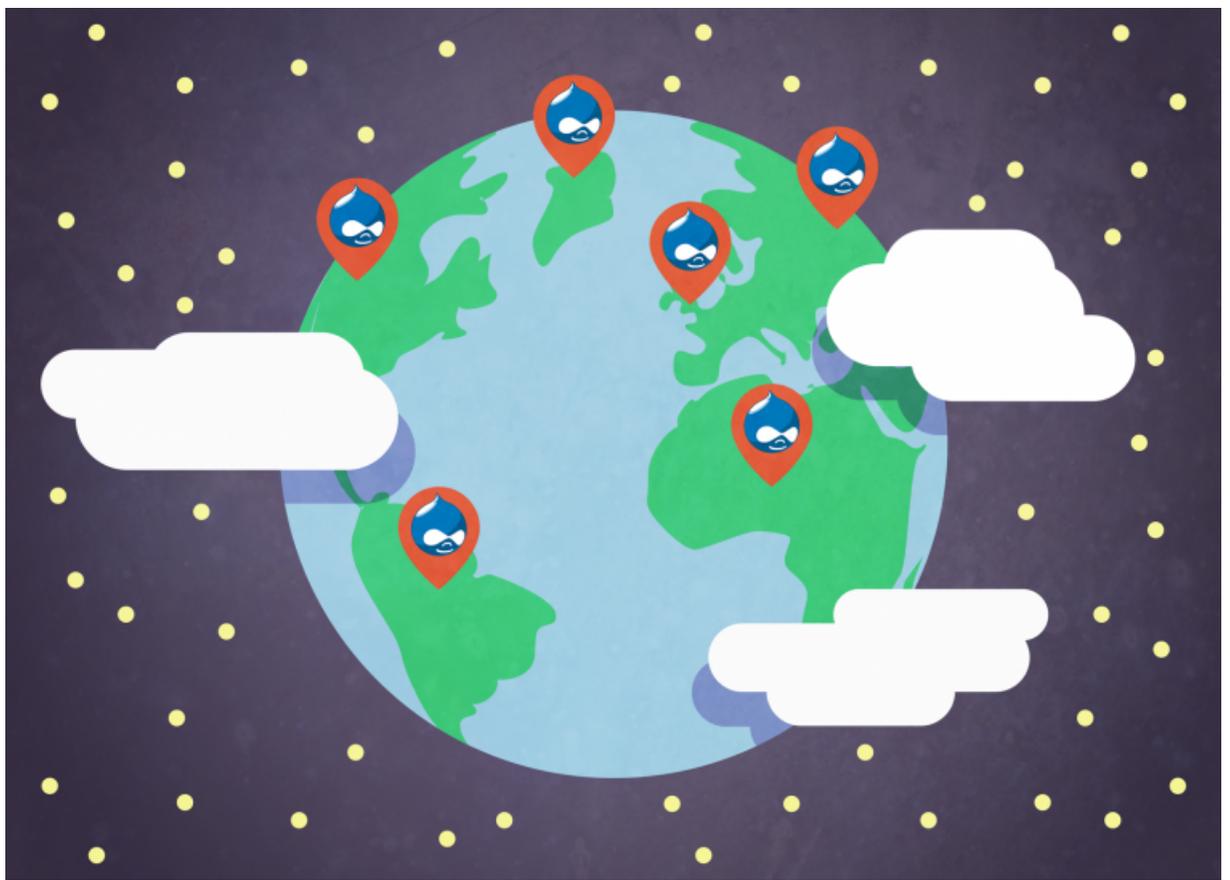


We sold Drupal to the world

BUSINESS + STRATEGY

by KELLY
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Much of the world has standardized on Drupal as their solution for a Content Management System for **over 700,000 websites**. This is not hard to see. For example, Drupal **makes headlines** when organizations like NYSE (before merging with **ICE**) decided to switch to it.

NYSE

“Once we had those sites up and running there was a huge pent up demand for other sites in the company, and we launched 37 more. It was a big task, as some of those websites hold tens of thousands of pages - being highly regulated we are required to post everything we do online.”

- Bob Kerner, NYSE SVP & Chief Digital Officer 2010

“The important thing for us is that we are able to keep a relatively small team of 60 developers”

- Bob Kerner, NYSE SVP & Chief Digital Officer 2010

“We have tons of work to do, but we will rely on Drupal to build our social community.”

- Bob Kerner, NYSE SVP & Chief Digital Officer 2010

- <https://www.acquia.com/resources/case-study/nyse-uronext>

Another example is NBC Universal.

NBC

"[NBC Universal has] 30 to 40 leading brands, such as Bravo, Syfy, Telemundo."

- Christopher Herring, Director, Publishing Program, NBC Universal

"We continue to push Drupal as our standard across the company."

- Rob Gill, Director, Operations, NBC Universal

- <http://www.acquia.com/resources/acquia-tv/conference/nbc-universal>

One of the most recent large scale pushes to Drupal is well underway at Pfizer. I asked Mike Lamb, Director of Marketing Technology at Pfizer, a few questions about it.

How many Drupal websites are currently in action at Pfizer?

Approx 500 -

How many people would you say it takes to support these sites?

Easiest to calculate suggesting a core team of 12 and then approx 1 person for every 15 sites, so approx 45 people. That's to keep the platform running – projects and enhancements is additional.

How many non-Drupal sites will become Drupal sites over the next few years?

I'd say approx 200 migrations per year. Drupal launches are a combination of site migrations and completely new sites.

This is a serious amount of Drupal for one, although a big one, company. I gave this info as a talk at a [Drupal Camp in Connecticut, MA](#). In two years, it will take the total attendance of that camp to support Drupal at Pfizer.

A little closer to home, I asked Gary Parker, Systems Analyst at University of Massachusetts (my alma mater), about it.

How many Drupal websites are currently in action at UMASS?

OIT hosts around 120 production sites. I believe there are probably another two dozen hosted by various departments managing their own servers.

How many will become Drupal over the next few years?

Given the number of sites currently in development and our rate of growth, I'd expect 30-50 additional Drupal sites within the next year.

These numbers are lower but this is still a lot of Drupal. The holy grail of this type of information, however, is perhaps the growing [list of Drupal sites in government](#). The "list includes embassies, parliaments, governmental portals, police, research centers, ministries/departments, monarchies etc. in more than 150 countries." Check it out if you haven't yet. It is awe inspiring.

How did this happen?

A popular answer involves a long list of Drupal's amazing feature set. But how did that happen? Drupal is not alone. It is just another shining example of a wildly successful open source project. Drupal is to the Content Management System what Linux was for the Operating System. So how do these things happen?

The reason, I think, takes the following points as its premise:

- Open Source software is inherently inclusive and collaborative.
- The vast majority of participation is driven by intrinsic motives for personal growth, relationships, and helping others.
- Participating is an endeavor that creates actual happiness, dedication, and community.
- Open Source thrives to the extent it is shared.

It is fairly straightforward to get involved in open source. Despite current issues with tech culture, the code is available, the tools are collaborative, and the standards are, for the most part, objective. Community develops from solving intrinsically interesting programming problems. This is rewarding not only to the individuals involved, but open source and the world benefits from this collaboration.

Drupal has fostered such a community for itself by being adequately inclusive and collaborative. It is trusted experts, from this community, that are being asked what they recommend be the solution to the Content Management System issue. Across the world, they are saying, "Drupal, hands down."

It is in this sense that we have effectively sold Drupal to the world. Now, we must stand by our recommendation. We must support it.

With worldwide adoption at the rate and scale we are seeing, there are some

challenges that are coming with it. Here are some:

- Are we supporting our solution efficiently?
- Seeming talent shortage
- Team retention
- Recruiting
- Community

Each of these challenges are not unique to Drupal and are painfully experienced across the entire IT industry. Solutions are many and vary significantly between each challenge. Taken one by one, each tell a familiar story.

Are we supporting our solution efficiently?

Drupal is a powerful system with a lot of complexity. It has an infamous learning curve with nearly every Drupal project needing access to an expert a few times in its existence. Are we able to provide the needed level of Drupal support at a sustainable and affordable rate? The number of new Drupal sites is quickly outpacing the number of new Drupal experts. Salaries and rates have been increasing dramatically over the years. Is there a supply and demand issue with supporting Drupal?

A popular response from Drupal experts, "Is this a problem? What's wrong with being in demand and making a lot of money?" During my survey on this topic, I also got responses like this:

We are basically pretty unhappy about that migration - it almost killed support for Drupal on this campus, and still might. If we could do it all over again we'd probably still be on 6.
-Name Withheld - VIP, A Five College Institution

The move from Drupal 6 to Drupal 7 has been very painful for many. Affordable Drupal expertise is rare and in demand, but the show must go on even if it ends horribly at times. It is reasonable to believe that, if this experience were to continue, Drupal would be abandoned.

Seeming talent shortage

Facts on this are popular across the entire computing industry. This one is concise and popular:

Some 1.2 million computing jobs will be available in the US in 2022,

graduates needed to fill them.

-NCWIT "By the numbers"

With a couple hundred million people out of work worldwide, an industry with an apparent talent shortage should give us pause. If you are a professional in the IT industry, consider this question:

How did you get into your field?

Nearly all answers to this question involve an entertaining tale of happenstance abruptly ending in, "...and that's how I got into IT." A popular term for this is, "accidental techie." Since no career path was chosen, nor specific degree given, the person's resulting career was accidental. For example, it is not unusual to find an English or Math degree in a Senior Programmer position. To go even further, I don't find it unreasonable to consider Computer Science degrees in a web developer position as "accidental" in this sense. There is no college course that teaches you how to optimize your local development stack or the importance of limiting rounds of revisions.

I don't fully agree, however, with the widespread use of this term. I'm sure some people truly do accidentally fall into a career in IT, but the rest end up there by following their heart. The issue is that the paths to entry are confusing, intimidating, and just damn hard for seemingly no good reason. It is not so much that there is a talent shortage as much as the directions in are mostly undefined.

Drupal, it seems, is no exception.

Team retention

If there is a talent shortage, then retention will be a challenge. Many organizations are finding themselves a stepping stone for their employees to

reach greener pastures. The big players, with deeper pockets and bigger promises, are harvesting talent from smaller players, leaving the latter's quality of work inconsistent as they scramble to find and train new talent.

And then there are statistics like this:

56% percent of Women leave IT by mid career
-Harvard Business Review - #10094

Not only are we not engaging enough talent to support this industry, but we are driving a staggering portion of it away.

Recruiting

On the question, "What is the biggest recruiting challenge your organization faces?" a Talent Technology 2012 recruitment survey found "Finding good candidates" way out ahead of the pack with, "Filling positions fast," in close second. Not only can we not find good candidates, but we can't find them fast enough. There is no surprise here given the discussion so far.

Community

The last challenge to be considered is us; ourselves. What do we do about this? For challenges so closely related, our solutions tend to be astonishingly specific. What can we do?

Hack Talent Shortage?

We can't solve this by staying up late and building a website. And what good will it really do to find a way to pump more people into an industry where a substantial portion are going to leave mid career?

Buy more kegs for the office?

The people who want more kegs aren't missing from this equation. The issue is that we've hired all the people that are excited by this sort of thing.

Get recruiters access to some NSA backdoors?

Obviously no, but allowing recruiters to be more invasive won't fix this.

"And, what did you do?"

-Rita (Nana) Albrecht, My Grandmother (1914-2014)

When I was a kid, my grandmother used to do this thing when I would tell on my sister. I would come running to my grandmother, "She's annoying me, she's annoying me, make her stop." My grandmother would always ask, "And, what did you do?" meaning, what had I done to my sister, which of course I would try to answer, "Nothing..."

She may have just been trying to get the full story but what always stuck with me was, if I just took a look at myself, I could see, I had a role to play in the situation.

So, community, we need to look at ourselves.

Talent Shortage - We need to look at ourselves

Find and support those working to ease entry into this field. Some example organizations (is there a good list somewhere?):

- NCWIT: <http://www.ncwit.org/resources/careers>
- Anyone doing anything with Scratch: <http://scratch.mit.edu/>

Here are two examples close to my home:

- CAITE: <http://caite.cs.umass.edu/>
- NERDs: <https://nerdsummit.org>

Groups are working hard on this already and they need our support and collaboration. Find and support organizations with goals of increasing student interest in, and preparation for, careers in STEM.

Retention - We need to look at ourselves

Here are some things we can do in our organizations to solve our retention issues:

Manager and Maker schedule distinction (see here)

I've seen this change IT company culture drastically for the better. [This is a](#)

topic all its own, but the basic idea is in recognizing the value in giving your Makers uninterrupted time to complete their work. A Maker is someone who makes something. Writers, Craftsman, Musicians, Painters, and Programmers are examples of Makers. They need schedules with long stretches of uninterrupted time to focus on doing a good job. With this understanding, Managers work to be a distraction buffer, managing incoming issues in order to optimize the experience of the Makers, whose work quality then excels and personal enjoyment increases. Tasks deliver with higher quality resulting in Managers producing overall better projects. Teammates are much less likely to leave a team which works like this.

Consider who your policies and improvements benefit

Team retention means considering everyone. If your policies and improvements tend to focus on a subset of your team, other team members are at risk of increasingly feeling excluded. Not feeling like good fit, they will start to consider your team as a stepping stone to a better situation. A new ping pong table or keg in the office may seem a quick win for smaller homogenous teams but will foster fracturing in better evolved and more realistic situations.

Increase inner company dialog and communication

Have regular conversations about how things are going internally. Work to foster feelings of safety in sharing one's pain points within the company. It is hard at first but invaluable once people become comfortable with sharing without fear of endangering their job and as people learn to listen without getting defensive. Increasing dialog increases accountability and alleviates resentments that would otherwise lead to a breakdown in the team.

Increase inner company transparency

This one is scary for many at first: Work to share more administrative details about the decisions that concern your team. Work to eliminate closed door meetings. Increasing transparency, increases trust and feelings of being trusted as well as feelings of true belonging to a group. It is also a way to share responsibility and, in that sense, ownership. Bad news is easier for a team to bear, and good news has a greater impact and is more intimate, when the decisions leading up to it were shared.

Make a Company Code of Conduct

Your team may be full of people that feel they don't need something like this. They may think things like, "if people mistreat me, I'll just tell them off" or, "we don't need this because we don't have a conduct problem." There is nothing wrong with putting it in writing what is expected and what isn't tolerated at your company. In fact, doing so means you take it seriously. It means you recognize that people are fallible, don't always know how to act, and putting it in writing is the first step to actually making an effort to be considerate and accepting of each member of your team. You can be sure this is extremely important to at least a few people on your team, even if they haven't found a way to express it. Do some research on other Codes of Conduct, it is very worthwhile.

Recruiting - We need to look at ourselves

We saw earlier that the biggest challenge recruiters face in an organization is finding good candidates, and fast enough. We can look at ourselves here and ask, "Who are we attracting?"

Does the organization prioritize things like:

- Beer outings
- Ping pong/Air hockey
- Long hours with big one-time rewards

The first two are examples of things that can feel exclusionary to a good candidate looking for a new team to call home. The last one doesn't work at all for people with families, for example, and is really only a great thing for very specific individuals having certain responsibilities and not others, like children. Your organization may currently feel on top of the world with those example perks above, but your next great candidates are turning and running away.

We can also ask, "How are we attracting talent?" For example, is the classic intimidating job posting involved?

Consider replacing things like this:

If you think you have the drive and positivity to fill these shoes:

- One
- Million
- Bulletpoints

With things like this:

If you have skills in one of these and are excited by the rest:

- Fewer
- Bulletpoints

Adjustments to our hiring techniques that make them more inviting and less intimidating are essential changes to make. We must also take this further by asking ourselves, "How hard are we looking?"

Consider this fact:

26% of the computing workforce in 2013 were women.
-NCWIT "By the numbers"

in the context of how you answered this question earlier:

How did you get into your field?

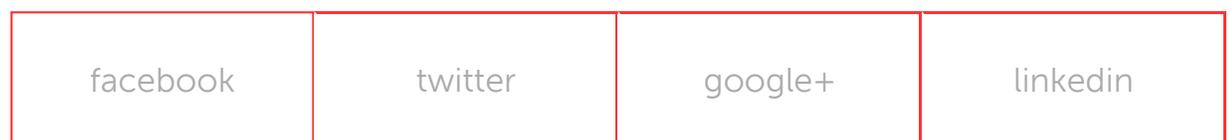
Most of us are having to find our way into IT "accidentally," and many of us aren't finding our way at all. The path to an IT career is currently pretty intimidating and rather obfuscated. It can be very hard to know whether or not you are going in the right direction or even just wasting your time trying.

Your next Drupal expert could be hiding beneath a rock of self doubt.

Community - We need to look at ourselves

[Read the rest here.](#)

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