Documentation at Scale

Kenneth Reitz
Hi.
Python Software Foundation
github.com/kennethreitz

- ~18 serious projects.
- 100+ experiments.
- OSX-GCC-Installer: 56TB of downloads.
- Requests: 13.8+ million downloads.
Other Interests...

- Street Photography & Photojournalism
- Synthesizers & Music Production
- World Travel (~140,000 miles last year)
- Public Speaker (29 events last year)
Early Human:

Alone with self & ideas.
Spoken Language:
Express ideas to others.
Written Language:
Persists ideas over time.
Human hardware hasn’t changed —
The software has been upgraded.
Communication: One-to-One.

At first, language was mostly used for a single person to communicate to another single person, or a small group of people.

This is no longer the case.
Communication: One-to-Many.

- After the printing press, a single privileged entity could communicate to the masses.
- Newspapers, Books, Television, Radio, etc.
- This formed the narrative of "the public".
- Very polarizing — unifying and destructive.
Communication: Many-to-Many.
The Internet!
Communication: Many-to-Many.

- If you have access to the internet, you have access to a universe of information and ideas.
- Anyone can publish anything to any number of people, large or small. A level playing field.
- The implications of this are huge.
Wikipedia
Information is Powerful

• Information is powerful — every day we see it transform the world around us.

• Documentation doesn’t always have to be about a software workflow or open source project — it can be used to develop and convey ideas much larger than yourself.
Documentation at Scale

- Information architecture is a powerful tool for developing ideas over time and space.
- It enables us to evolve and distill information at a much larger scale than a single person or team could ever achieve on their own.
Documentation at Scale

• The Open Source Software style of development works because it allows people to create something larger than themselves.

• Why are we only doing this with tech?

• We should be doing this with everything!
For the first time in Human History!

We have the technology.
The Tools
The Tools Are Ready!

- Read the Docs + GitHub Pull Requests
- Instant version-controlled documentation that anyone in the world can contribute to.
- The software development community seems to be a testbed for technology that will soon be mainstream. This has to be one of them.
Python-Guide.org

- Python-Guide.org uses this workflow.
- Continually updated by 156 contributors.
- 50,000+ people view it every month.
- Originally outlined and continually curated by myself. Just like an open source project.
Bigger Than It Seems

- A book, written by 156 people from all over the world, updated daily, transparently curated by an author, requiring zero time to publish, and available globally within seconds?

- This sounds simple to us. It’s revolutionary.
Go, Write Docs!

• Go and make some repos that contain only prose, no code. Start building some ideas with others — or just yourself.

• Topics need not be technical — build docs on philosophy, humanities, literature, arts, sciences, poetry — everything!
Go, Build Tools!

- There needs to be more competition!
- ReStructuredText is amazing, but quite unapproachable for most people.
- The same applies to Git and GitHub.
- There’s much work to be done!
Other Considerations

- Internationalization
- "Be Cordial" Policy
- Contribution Guide
- Persistent Archiving
- Reducing Bus-Factor
- Fast Revision Merging

Space  <->  Time
The world is made language.
Become the author.
Write the Docs.