platformOS Developer Portal

Diana Lakatos shares some insights on building the UKTC Award winning developer documentation site.

The platformOS Developer Portal provides comprehensive documentation to developers building their apps or sites on platformOS. Following the docs as code[1] approach, it is built to support the iterative process and community collaboration — it swiftly adapts to users' needs, while involving them in all phases of the editorial workflow. As a fully open-source, high-performance site with a Google PageSpeed Insights score of 100, it also serves as a best practice example of building a documentation site on platformOS.

Content

The platformOS Developer Portal includes an auto-generated, always up-to-date, remote REST API[2] reference documentation. The documentation is fully searchable and very fast, as the content is rendered server-side. It provides a concise and complete documentation starter kit to newcomers and includes conceptual information, step-by-step onboarding and a fully working sample site with a module pre-installed to be used as a sandbox. Step-by-step tutorials for more experienced users are grouped by features (for example, Forms), ordered by difficulty (from beginner to advanced), and they cross-reference related subsections and topics. We add examples, developer tips and best practices where applicable. Many topics and tutorial series include full example code accessible in our public GitHub repository. All code samples are displayed with language-specific syntax highlighting to allow for easier comprehension. We regularly publish articles on our blog about the implementation of specific features, workflows, or best practices.

Strategy

Throughout the process of building our documentation site, we followed

> "This is an outstanding example of how technical product documentation can work as an integrated part of the product, the teams that create it and the community that uses it. The technical communication 'team' is everyone in the business and many out in the partner and user communities. But the only way that 'team' can produce the quality they have is through strong leadership driving through a carefully considered strategy."
>
> Excerpt from the Judges' feedback

Content First and Design Thinking approaches, and are continuously revalidating and improving our design and user experience through an iterative approach supported by user research.

Workflow

Our workflow is unique in its flexibility to support any type of participant: internal developers, writers, editors, partners, or external contributors. We implemented a complete docs as code workflow on GitHub, and took it even further by incorporating issue tracking and project management. We implemented continuous integration and deployment with automated testing.

Diana Lakatos accepting her award from Paul Ballard at TCUK 2019

Our editorial workflow ensures that contribution works the same way for everyone, and we support our contributors with an easy-to-use feedback block, a style guide, templates for each type of content and a contributor guide.

Community

We facilitate and encourage collaboration with our community by providing Slack support, weekly video conference, status reports, roadmaps, release notes and regular postings to our blog. Users can contribute immediately from the page where they discover a problem, or if they feel the information is confusing, by clicking on the feedback card provided on each topic page. They can either add feedback or contribute directly via GitHub.

We're honoured and grateful to be recognised by such a prestigious award, and would like to thank the judges for their review and detailed feedback, and the organisers for the wonderful event. Thank you to all our team members and all members of our community who contributed to our documentation. **C**

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[1] Documentation as Code (Docs as Code) refers to a philosophy that you should be writing documentation with the same tools as code. www.writethedocs.org/guide/docs-as-code (accessed 10 November 2019)

[2] A RESTful API is an application program interface (API) that uses HTTP requests to GET, PUT, POST and DELETE data. https://searchapparchitecture.techtarget.com/definition/RESTful-API (accessed 10 November 2019)

Diana Lakatos is an experienced Technical Writer specialised in developer documentation. As the Director of Documentation, she developed the documentation processes for the UKTC Award winning platformOS Developer Portal. She manages all phases of the editorial workflow, creates templates, incorporates best practices, and writes, edits and reviews content.
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