Application for Summer of Code 2006: Konstantin Käfer

Synopsis

I will introduce several features that make Drupal more user-friendly. These include visual aids for rather complicated tasks like reordering a menu tree, but also improvements that will make every-day administration of a Drupal site more convenient such as enabling or disabling settings without a page reload.

Project

My efforts will actually be three separate tasks to complete. Despite that, all three have something in common: they enhance the interface to manage a Drupal site more quickly.

(I know very well where to use client-side scripting and where not. Also, I am not a friend of all these AJAX applications that are currently spreading across the net and which are using AJAX (or call it AJAX) for the AJAX' sake. Nonetheless there are several issues where it's quite useful to use scripting in order to provide a more convenient interface that really benefits the user.)

An enhancement I'd like to contribute to the Drupal project is fast toggling. Drupal has several binary settings scattered around the administration interface. These can usually be toggled with a click on a link, which makes Drupal perform a certain task such as publishing or unpublishing a node, enabling/disabling a menu item, making a node promoted and so forth. But these settings could be toggled a lot faster using AJAX or AHAH techniques. At the moment, if the user changes a setting, he has to reload the entire page, altough there is just one small thing changed on it (i.e. the state of a node). The JavaScript basically just changes the target of a link to use JavaScript if available and make the changes in the background allowing the user to continue administering his site while the change is saved.

Another feature I will implement is the quick renaming of strings. The process of changing strings, be they node titles, url aliases or strings that are part of the user interface, is not very intuitive at the moment. A user has to click on edit, make the change, click on submit and probably even return to the previous page. However, it

would be much easier if he could just click on the string he wants to change. The string in question is replaced with a text field and two buttons to submit and cancel the changes are displayed below the field. If the user decides to submit, a request is sent to the server via AHAH (hidden IFrame), if not, the original text is restored. The user has full control about whether to submit the changes or discard them. Secondly, a site administrator can enable "live translation mode" which allows him to click on any (localized) string around the interface and edit it in-place. This removes some hassle from the task of adapting Drupal's user interface to the needs of the site. This will be implemented as a separate module and will be only necessary during site setup (or if the user wants to change something later). This feature doesn't break functionality for users without JavaScript as it just introduces a new, faster way to edit strings, and is not replacing them.

The third item on the list is a menu tree. Currently, the selection of a menu item, for example on a node editing form, is rather complicated, once there are a lot of menu items on the website. All menu items are in one dropdown box which can get pretty big as a website grows, even if the shown items are restricted to a certain menu. And if a user wants to rearrange his menu items, he has to remember all the weights associated with the items and change each item separately, which is not very intuitive. I will provide a module (that can easily be integrated into core) that displays menu item listings or selections as a tree. This tree can be collapsed and expanded as needed and an item can be selected. If the user didn't enable JavaScript, the menu tree will of course remain usable. On certain pages, the user is also allowed to simply drag a part of a menu tree or just a single menu item to another place within the tree, allowing him to quickly reorganize the hierarchy. The weights are recalculated automatically if needed.

Profit for Drupal

1. Facilitate the use of Drupal by allowing the user to change and reorganzie information more quickly, thus making the interface more intuitive and responsive.
2. Easier deployment of Drupal installations to clients by adapting the user interface to their needs. E.g. a site for a young audience requires different messages than one that sells custom-made suits.

Success Criteria

- Create the modules described above. The functionality has to work in all widely used browsers which include Internet Explorer 6 and 7, Mozilla and its derivates, Opera 8 and above and Safari. If the enhancements don't work in a browser, they degrade gracefully.
- Use the least core patching possible by using Drupal's hook system. If it's impossible in a certain case, I will provide patches to core (will be necessary most likely for the live translation mode).

Roadmap

1. Publish my goals to the Drupal community and try to get some feedback and suggestions on my plans. I will get familiar with the specific Drupal internals that I require for my work. (until mid of June)
2. Implement features in the order they are specified above. That means that I will begin with the implementation of the fast toggle links, continue with live editing and finally build the interactive menu tree. I will try to implement things so that they can be used despite they are not completely finished. (until beginning or mid of August)
3. Testing of all features with the help of the Drupal community. This will begin as soon as one component is finished and should be completed by the end of August.

Biography

I am an 18 year old student from the small town of Bad Windsheim, which is located in Bavaria in Germany. With the age of twelve, I won a website coding contest from the Bavarian ministry of Culture and Education. Since about three years, I'm in dynamic web application coding, especially with PHP and MySQL. I am familiar with web standards and I'm also a bit interested in design and typography.

Currently, I'm in high school in twelfth grade. I am leading an elective about web design since about four years whose main goal is to publish content around the high school on the internet (cf. http://gwsg.net/). I am also maintaining a blog which is written in German since almost two years (http://timcn.de).

I have been doing various Drupal stuff before (cf. http://drupal.org/user/14572). I provide bug reports and patches to core from time to time (cf. issues #30775, #37378, #53949, #58590). I have also written some other patches that are not yet committed (issues #30711, #41188, #48167). Also, I have written two modules called "Slideshow" (#59469) and "Advanced menu item settings" (#58634). I think I have quite some understanding of how Drupal works. I am following the discussions on the Development mailing list since about half a year. I have also provided a considerable amount of strings to the German translation. That said, I think that I will succeed in providing clean and "drupalish" enhancements to the whole project.