

1. Firstly, Paul, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Me. They are 2 little bits. More little bits and bigger bytes follow below ;-)

2. How much time do you devoted to miniBB growth? Do you have other full time job?

For sure, I have, not only the full time job, but also tons of related and non-miniBB-related projects. This all makes interest to me. Time related to miniBB varies from my working traffic; it's more a "hobby" project, but quite successful, and growing to something more serious. Our team started deloping miniBB project in 2000; I'm supposing, from this time to now I'm relating averagely 1-2 hours to miniBB each day, incl. users support. When working on a serious release, I'm investing up to 3 hours per business day.

3. How large is the miniBB team?

We are actually only two programmers - me and Sergei Larionov. We also have additional "femine" on support ;-). The history of open source boards like phpBB shows, that software could turn into a crap, if everybody is writing something individual in it. Everybody has his own knowledge level and style of programming, so... miniBB is just *our* software. Of course, 3rd party additions are welcome - but they should always meet our strong conditions.

4. Can you briefly explain your development environment? Any particular tools you are using?

Almost nobody believes we are not using something special. For years, I've used ultra-simple Metapad editor; now changed it to more advanced, yet very simple and fast Notepad2. It's not necessary visualize the code, if it's living in your head. From file management tools Total Commander is recommended, as file browser and FTP manager. Basically, they are two tools I can create, and I'm creating online software with.

Sergei is using Macromedia Homesite. If you don't know what the Homesite is, it's a quick effective program allowing to edit multiple files at once. Has some nice PHP code highlighting somewhat reminding the one from Turbo Pascal.

5. There are many forum software in the market, why you decided create your own forum software?

When we've decided, there was a strange principle on the market - to overload forum software with more and more features, and thus more and more bugs, until the program gets out of control. Example of customizing phpBB showed me: there are things, that I want to change, - so it's better to start from scratch, and to create something useful, small and clean. It was more than a "software for myself", and I thought that other people also would be interested in the program like this; so miniBB became available as free open source program for everybody.

6. Why you chose the current business model for miniBB, which is released under GPL license, and provide paid plug-in service?

Free world should not be money free world, if we talk about open source. The things could cost you nothing - but that only means somebody has got to pay for them. We have a completely useful, tested and secured forum software, built for years, and fully working version is downloadable for free. If you want to extend it, you have a choice: either to program yourself, or to buy some ready and stable peace of code from us, and get a new feature within the shortest time possible.

We are skilled professionals, and miniBB is an independent project - so, we are not supported by a "constant" sponsor, and we are charging reasonable but small fees for some additional stuff just for supporting it by ourselves. As I've mentioned, I'm earning also on other jobs, and I would be too lazy to support miniBB without getting something from it, after getting more than something from other projects. Check around - and you'll see tons of "dead" free programs (incl. Notepad2, by the way), mostly because they were "completely free" or donated.

7. Did you ever think about making miniBB as a commercial software? If yes, why didn't you choose it?

Free software has a great advantage - it may be used by more different people around, unlike a paid product. It's a great way to debug and improve it, getting multiple responses from all around the world, and learning to communicate. Starting miniBB, I hadn't a lot of experience or authority; but that's what I've got and still getting. That's why only now, in skilled study, I'm thinking about commercial version of miniBB; but these are only plans, which may become true.

8. Quite often we see a debate between the open source and commercial software, what is your opinion on this?

I think, quality and usability should be the main aspect of any software, doesn't matter, if it's free or not. There are free premium level products, and premium paid garbage in a nice package.

9. I noticed that some of the miniBB add-on is free. How do you determine what features release as a paid add-on and what features released with the miniBB package or released as free add-on?

We have introduced paid stuff only recently; I thought, that it would be useless to distribute fresh original coding ideas without getting a profit. It also depends on the time invested in programming this or that component; also as no support may be required for it in the future.

10. What do you think makes miniBB better than the competitors?

It's a good software to *start* a content-oriented community, or "just-a-support" board. First, get your visitors to cook some content for you; only after you can think about more attractive things, if necessary. miniBB has high customization possibilities - from layout level to external users database, so it can fit almost any existing web-page very well; and you (having some experience, of course) can turn it onto something different from other boards, something different even from miniBB itself. And of course, I like miniBB's simplicity and effective interface - it's saving a lot of time on postings.

11. What is the most requested feature from your users?

Currently, we are getting not much new general requests. All most requested features are already available, in the core itself or in the add-ons. I think, they are covering 90% of all discussion software useful features. If we talk about it more specifically, "smilies", "avatars" and "file upload" things are the most requested and popular. Anyway, they are not the features I am missing myself :-). The most important feature left to implement, I think, is the archiving possibility, when you can run the forums within ages. That's the main goal left to make it perfect; but a couple of years are required to make a decision, how to make it better.

12. I think miniBB v2.0 Final will be release soon, what new features included in this new version?

There will be all features you see in the latest 'RC' (release candidate) series releases. In the main core, we will fix only bugs, possible errors, etc. Stability and security are the main points now. We are not going to implement general features in the main core anymore, since, I think, everything custom could be made, not destructing the core. As far as I know, adding new stuff always draws a way of new errors; but that's not we are trying to achieve. No features - no cry.

13. Where do you see the project heading in the next 12 months? What's your plan for miniBB after v2.0 Final release?

June is the time for releasing official stable release, if there won't be any special circumstances. After it, we will think on re-building our own forums into more categorized and clean board, remove all unrelated topics, 'dead' users etc. Commercial miniBB package is planned later - it will include all premium and free plugins compiled together, and we will also provide paid installation and support of this version. Registering miniBB trademark is also a big plan; currently we are waiting for an examination from US Patents and Trademarks office, where we recently have sent a trademark application to. And of course, we won't stop working on a free miniBB release. New small add-ons will be released, users will get support in our forums, discovered errors will be fixed - usual things.

14. Many developers now choose to provide remotely hosted software instead of downloadable software, what do you think about this?

I think, it's the same, as if you rent an apartment, and own it.

15. How do you feel about the growth of forum software and their effect on the web topography?

Forum software is a great way of spreading people's knowledge; it's just a part of web topography, but really impressive. So, I think, there will be enough new topics to discuss for a long time. Each generation brings new topics.

16. What do you think about the future of forum software development?

I think, only successful and popular software will stay on the market for a long time; leaders are already known. Of course, there will be a lot of new projects, but most of them will not survive. What will be amongst this software, finally? I don't know - but would be glad if miniBB would, too :-). So if you are starting a forum software project - think first, how can it attract customers, comparing to existing projects; else you will bury it soon.

17. Can you describe the miniBB community?

We have not a lot of constant visitors, but those existing, are really people to have a nice deal with. Our community is created for supporting software itself; so it's still related only to technical stuff, and no off-topics are allowed; serious and literate posters are welcome first. Maybe we will introduce 'more freedom' after the final release.

18. As a forum administrator, do you have any advice to other forum administrator?

My advice is not to hear other advices, and not give your own.

19. What do you do in spare time?

Spare time?.. I don't know what is it.

20. What websites do you visit everyday? (other than your own one)

They include: Google, payment processors, local news site, local SMS sending site, local meetings site, and local classifieds. Sometimes I think, that I am more developing Internet, than using it :-)

21. Thanks so much for taking the time to have this interview with us. Is there anything else that has been on your mind that you'd like to mention?

Thank you, too! It's a nice chance to feel like a star, giving interviews ;-)

Thank you!