

The Apache Helpdesk

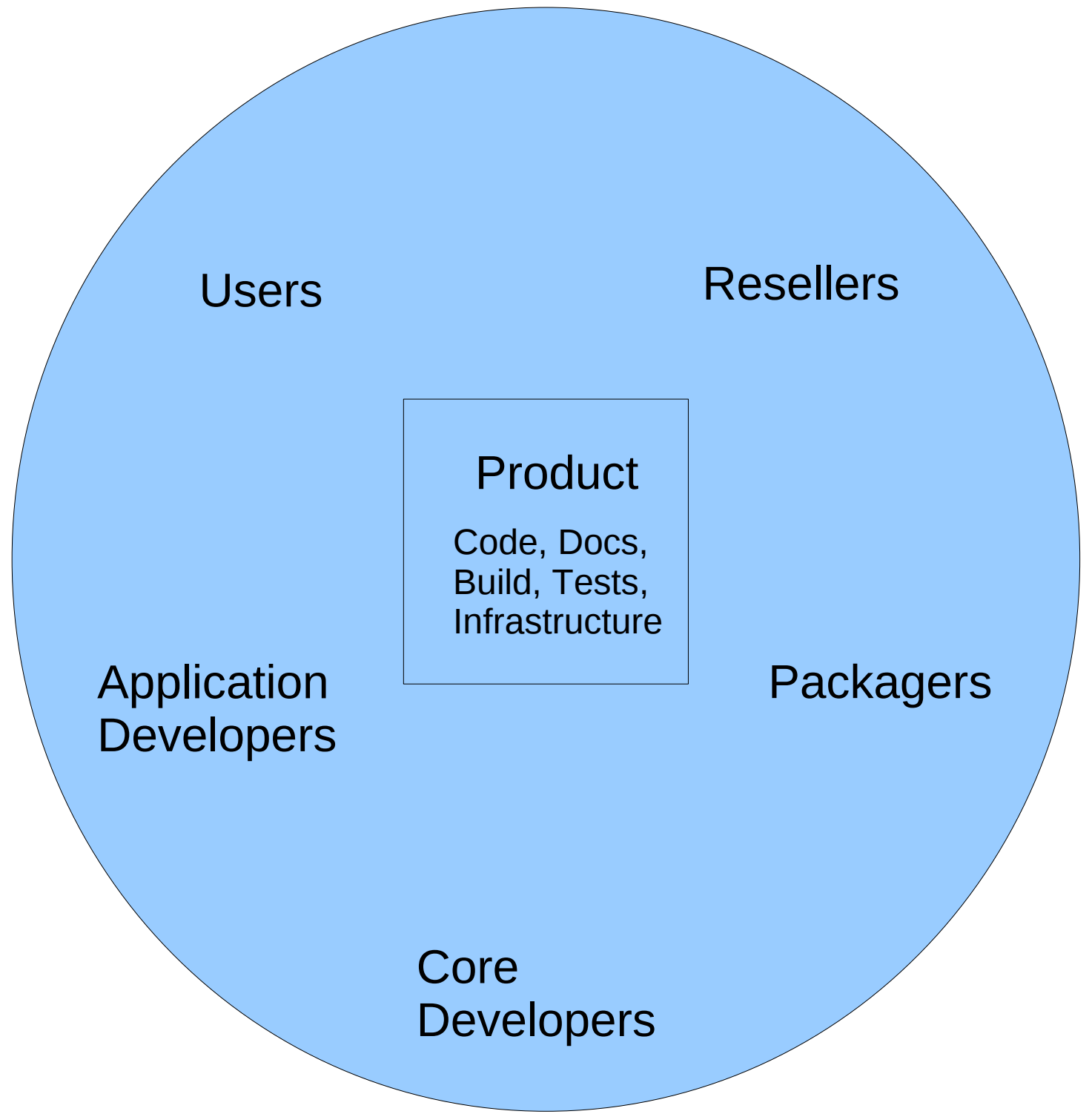
Support Ecosystem for Open Source Projects.

Strengths and Weaknesses?

Can we learn from each other?

Where does/should free support end?

Project
Ecosystem



Developers

- Core devs are in charge
- Designers, Coders, Documenters, Testers, Maintainers, Infrastructure.

Application developers needs:

- Stable, clear, well-documented API
- Welcoming community

Integrators

- Clarity: licensing, consistent versioning, regression testing.
- Low level: Customisation, dependencies rpm, deb, pkg, etc.
- Higher-level: Value-added products – e.g. Sun, IBM, Oracle; also free *AMP stack.

Integrators both produce and consume support. They may also add complexity and confusion.

http://www.theregister.co.uk/2006/11/04/apache_packages_support_vacuum/

Resellers

- Product reseller == Integrator
- Service resellers: e.g. ISPs, web-based services.

Resellers both provide and consume support, and their users may fall back on 'upstream' support communities.

Typical Problem: User cannot supply reseller-specific information needed by helper.

Users

- Novice, Experienced, Expert
- Corporate, Small Biz, Individual
- May be using product modified by a packager and/or service provider.
- Support needs – many and varied.

Support Needs

Who are the users for a project?

- APR – users are techies – can cope with coming straight to the dev community.
- HTTPD – users at all levels, many dumb questions, FAQs. Need separate support.
- *AMP – Multiple dev communities, all levels of users. Fragmented ecosystem!

A healthy ecosystem demands there should be support for users at all levels applicable to the project.

Support Ecosystem: Topdown

- Documentation
- Books
- FAQs, Tutorials
- Meaningful Error Messages
- Tools
- Infrastructure

Support Ecosystem: Mutual

- Collaborative Docs, wikis
- Mailinglists/online fora → Archives → google
- Interactive fora – IRC/etc
- Bots, AutoFAQ
- Keyword lookup
- Error message lookup
- Packaging Quirks

Pot luck with free support

- Managing expectations:

http://www.theregister.co.uk/2006/02/27/perpetual_motion_apache/

- The blind leading the blind: ill-formed questions, wrong or misleading answers. Preserved in archives!
 - Improve search/browse for archives?
 - Ratings?
- Cargo-Cult: outdated/zombie knowledge:

http://www.theregister.co.uk/2006/08/01/apache_undead/

- Can't guarantee good behaviour on a mutual forum!

Support Ecosystem: Commercial

- BigCo: a supported product/suite
- BigCo: a supported service/suite
- SmallMan: tasks to order

- Rollouts
- Service levels
- Hotlines
- Liability

Ideas

?