

IN719 Systems Administration

Request Tracker (RT)

Introduction

The first topic on the *Operations Report Card* was the use of a ticketing system. We will address that topic now. A ticketing system allows users, sysadmins, and managers to submit work items, and it allows sysadmins to track and document progress on work items. It helps in three important ways:

1. It helps us organise our work;
2. It helps us document our work;
3. It helps us communicate with affected parties.

There are several ticketing systems available. In this paper we will use *Request Tracker* (RT). It's a widely used and well regarded system. It's also Free/Open Source, so it is an easy system to introduce into an organisation that does not already have such a system.

There are two main ways in which people interact with RT. Most users just use email. Sysadmins and other people who respond to tickets use email and a web interface. Our RT instance is at <http://rt.sqrawler.com>. You should already have an account on the system that uses your OP user name and that is initially set up with the password "P@ssw0rd". Check that you are able to log in on the web site.

1 Queues

Tickets in RT are sorted into queues. Queues may be set up based on who is responsible for handling tickets, or by the ticket topic. For example, there is a queue in our system called "lecturer" that is used for issues related to the running of the paper and those tickets are handled by the lecturer.

Each queue has an email address associated with it, and most users will submit a ticket by sending an email to that address. You can submit a ticket to the lecturer queue by sending email to `lecturer@sqrawler.com`. Submit a sample ticket now, using your OP student email ¹. During the rest of the semester you can raise issues related to the course by submitting tickets to that queue.

You will be placed in a student team that will be identified by a letter of the alphabet, e.g., group "X". Your RT queue will then be called "GroupX" and the queue email address will be `rt-groupx@sqrawler.com`. When a new ticket is submitted, everyone in the group will receive a notification via email. If you respond to that email, the response will be logged and also directed to the ticket submitter.

There is a second email address used for commenting on tickets. For group X that address is `rt-groupx-comment@sqrawler.com`. Comments are used by sysadmins to add information to the ticket record but are not relayed to the ticket submitter.

You can also add correspondence and comments through the web interface.

2 Workflow

Here is a basic workflow for using RT.

1. A user with an issue submits a ticket via email. He receives an automated response notifying him that the ticket was submitted.
2. Sysadmins responsible for the queue receive notifications of the new ticket by email.
3. A sysadmin decides to take responsibility for the ticket, logs into the web site, and takes "ownership" of the ticket.

¹Only authorised users can submit tickets, and your authorisation is tied to your email address

4. When the sysadmin starts work on the ticket, she changes its status to “open”. She can correspond with the submitter and comment on the ticket as necessary.
5. If necessary, ownership of the ticket can be transferred to another sysadmin. The current owner can flip it to someone else, another sysadmin can take it, or a third person, like a manager, can reassign it.
6. When the issue is resolved, the owner changes the ticket status to “resolved”. The submitter will receive a notification.

Note that there are other ways to close a ticket. For example, a sysadmin may “reject” a ticket that is related to an unsupported system.

Also, note that you should not “open” a ticket until you actively start work on it, so that the time between opening and resolving the ticket will accurately reflect the time spent working on it.

3 Exercise

Once you have your team and RT queue, run through the ticket workflow with your team a couple of times. Be sure that you know how to submit, take, open, comment and correspond on, transfer ownership, and close a ticket. Part of your first performance review will be based on how well you use RT. Also, from now on any task that you are expected to perform for this paper, aside from the final exam, will be assigned to you as an RT ticket.