

So to give you some perspective, I've been trying to implement a seamlessly- integrated forum on this site for about 2 months now. I first started playing with it over the Christmas holidays and have been experimenting with it off-and-on ever since.

The problem is that I have been spoiled by the relative ease of integrating the SMF forum into Joomla 1.0. There is a very good extension available on that platform and, despite having to hack the core, it works near-flawlessly. Once i did some custom coding to have the forum URLs rewritten to be huma-readable, I was in the money. If you've ever been to the JCal Pro forums, you'll know what i am talking about.

Based on my past experience then, here are the minimum requirements for a properly integrated forum:

1. Frameless integration of the forum within Joomla, linked via a menu item. This is needed to assign modules to be displayed along with the forum.
2. URLs that change with the forum content (i.e. wrapped forums always have one URL, regardless of what you are viewing in the forum). This option also allows for SEF URL support.
3. Userbase and password synchronization
4. Bi-directional login and logout so users are always logged into both Joomla and the forum
5. Interaction with or replacement of the desired Joomla! user registration process (native or 3rd party)

This may sound simple, but the developer community has not come up with a suitable application that easily handles all of these requirements. Of course I didn't realize this at the beginning. Here's how I learned some hard lessons about forums integration in Joomla 1.5:

1. **Fireboard** - Fireboard has never been a real competitor with the forum big-boys like SMF or PHPBB. However, it was a native Joomla 1.0 application which held a lot of appeal for users. Having used SMF extensively, it would be hard for me to use FB now and give up the awesome power of an enterprise-class forum. In addition, FB requires the Legacy plugin to function in Joomla 1.5 and I have never been able to get FB working well out-of-the-box.

2. **Rokbridge** - Despite it's name, this extension from Rocketwerx/Rockettheme is not a true bridge. The only bridge function it performs is the bi-directional login between Joomla 1.5 and PHPBB3. This limitation is offset somewhat by the plethora of commercial PHPBB3 themes offered by the same vendor. However, in the end what you are left with is a menu item on your

Joomla site that opens a separate, stand-alone PHPBB3 install in which your login credentials have already been processed. This is clearly not a 'seamless' integration, and if you are not using matching Joomla and PHPBB3 templates, a lot of work remains if you want your users to not feel too lost when they switch between the Joomla and PHPBB3 sites.

3. **JFusion** - In the past, I have found JFusion quite buggy and I was reluctant to try it again. However, a new version was released with support for more applications, and the forum activity at JFusion.org was reasonably robust. So I took a gamble and tried JFusion for both SMF and PHPBB3. Although I did experience some difficulty in the beginning as the installation and configuration process is rather complicated, I eventually succeeded in getting a reasonably-well integrated forum on this Joomla site. I'll blog more about this process in my follow-up post, but suffice it to say JFusion and PHPBB3 is currently the best option for an enterprise-class forum in Joomla 1.5.

4. **SJSB** - This acronym stands for '[Simple Joomla! 1.5.x / SMF 2.x bridge](#)'. Unfortunately, I did not test this bridge as I had already gone too far down the path with JFusion when one of my JCal Pro subscribers brought this project to my attention. However, it looks like a promising solution for an SMF forum in Joomla 1.5. Hopefully I will get a chance to compare it to the other ones noted above and can then make a good table comparing all the features.

5. **Kunena** - This is a recent fork of Fireboard and although it seems to work better out-of-the-box, it is still not feature-rich compared to SMF or PHPBB.

6. **ccBoard & Agora** - These forum extensions are both Joomla 1.5 native and each have some integration with social utilities like Community Builder and JomSocial. However, true-enterprise features are lacking in these very capable, highly rated forum extensions.

Stay tuned for my 'part 28' when I talk about the rather harrowing process to get my commercial PHPBB3 theme playing nicely with JFusion.