

When to use the Forums instead of Mattermost

What is the difference between chat and discussion?

Chat (Mattermost) and discussion (Forums) are two very different things. This document attempts to explain their individual uses.

Think of chat (Mattermost) as being a bit like conversations around a table in a cafe or pub or at a large dinner. There are multiple things going on at the same time, it may get noisy, threads get interrupted and side-tracked. There is a lot of good social communication going on, but the focus is more on exchange of ideas than working on a particular topic. It's a big room, and you can move around multiple tables listening to what is going on and chipping in.

Think of discussion (Forums) as more like a meeting or conference with break-out sessions going on in parallel. Each category is a session, and each session might include several agenda items (topics). The sessions are focused on a particular area and are working on solving problems and developing ideas in that area.

Some people need one, some the other, some both.

Chat is more ephemeral; discussion is where work gets done. Trying to have a single system handle both inevitably involves compromises and results in confusion. In chat, it is often difficult to find previous ideas, and you therefore don't want useful information which you might need again to be lost in there. In discussion, you are focussed on a specific topic and may want to avoid immediate distractions – difficult in chat rooms.

Chat benefits from quick responses, so a good mobile app can be important, but we must be careful not to exclude those without smartphones. One failing of the widely-used WhatsApp chat application is that it does require you to have a smartphone to use it. Even Signal, which can be used on a laptop without a tethered phone, requires access to a smartphone to initially set it up.

Discussion requires more active listening, considering what is said and providing a thoughtful response. Here mobile 'presence' is less important, and the layout needs to make it easy to find contributions and provide more detailed replies. A larger screen than a phone and a proper keyboard are often useful.

What tools should I be using?

Most Rebels involved in organising local or working groups will need discussion and should be on the Forum.

Less active people may not need online discussion at all, or they may occasionally respond to a call to participate in an important decision for the group, dipping into a discussion forum to do so.

For a local group, chat is probably what most people will use for day to day keeping in touch with each other. One big advantage of Mattermost is that it does not require a smartphone to use it. Furthermore, by employing a platform that is run by XR and used across all international groups it is both robust and secure, and enables the local, regional, national, and international chat channels that a user chooses to follow to all appear in one place.

Working and organising groups will probably be using both chat and discussion.

Further Information

For further information about this important distinction please refer to this [blog post](#).
