

Show HN: Linen.team – A lightweight, thread-first Slack alternative

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Hi HN! I'm Kam, the founder and one of the authors of Linen. Today, we are launching Linen.team (<https://linen.team/>), a lightweight threaded messaging app for your team.

Modern workplace messaging apps (like Slack) are based on IRC, which is great for small groups, but as it scales, breaks down quickly: you either get overwhelmed by notifications or you have to turn them all off. Most chat apps have threads tacked on but aren't built from the ground up with this design in mind. We wanted to create a thread-first experience where you can organize and prioritize conversations so that you are not reliant on notifications to make sure you don't miss anything.

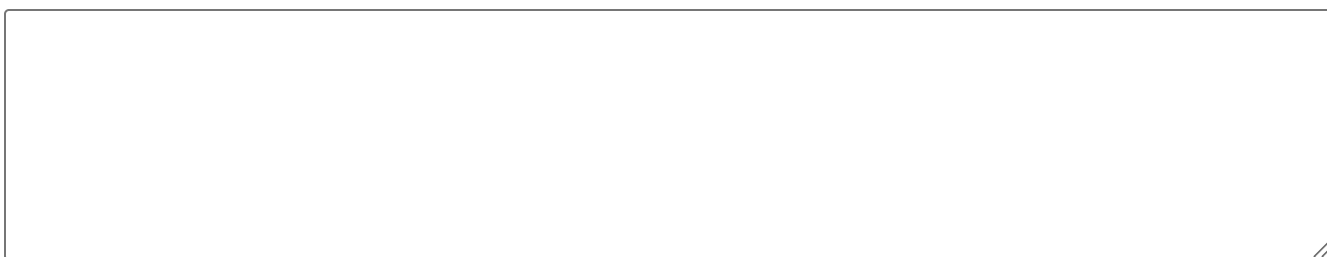
In apps like Slack, you have to check activities, channels, threads, and replies just to make sure you aren't missing anything important. We designed every message in Linen to belong to a thread, so it makes it easy to centralize everything in a single location. We let you select which channels you subscribe to from your inbox. This way, your inbox only has the important channels. This makes it easy to keep track of conversations without having to rely on notifications to make sure you don't miss anything.

We also wanted a better way to separate urgent vs. non-urgent communication. In Linen, we have introduced the concept of a !mention that is designed for urgent/time-sensitive messages. A !mention will send a push notification, whereas an @mention will show up in the person's inbox. This allows us to encourage more async conversations and reduce the need for the number of push notifications. We also designed the mention system closely with the inbox so that even if you aren't subscribed to channels, mentions will still appear in your inbox. This is great for joining partner teams where you don't need to view every conversation but do need to respond when you are mentioned.

We believe that most messaging apps are secretly to-do lists in disguise; you have to read, respond, or do some task when you receive a thread. We wanted to give you the ability to manage threads individually. We let you mark each thread as done, which hides them from your inbox and is useful to keep track of tasks. You also can set reminders and mute threads with one click/key. With these features, we make it easy to get to a zero inbox state. This combined with the inbox makes it easy for you to keep track of conversations and make sure you don't miss anything.

Linen is designed for power users. We love keyboard shortcuts and want an experience that is keyboard-first. For many, the messaging app is the app that is used the most. We believe that you should be able to use Linen for an entire day without touching the mouse. We've added modern features like CMD+K for navigation. We've designed Linen to be fast and lightweight. Our gzipped bundle size is 400KB, so it's fast on first load, and we've introduced multiple layers of caching to make sure things are fast on subsequent loads.

We've been working hard on this app for the past 6 months, so there are still gaps in the platform. But we're also very excited about the direction we can take. Our focus is on what a modern message platform built in 2024 should look like and what lessons we can take from the previous decades of IRC and messaging apps. If our message resonates with you, we would love for you to give us a try at <https://www.linen.team/signup?callbackUrl=%2Flinen>, where you can join our public community and come say hi!



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apimade 4 hours ago | next [-]

If this is just a replacement chat tool, it's fine - and a great start.

But if you want to replace Slack, you need to focus on the developer community and third-party integrations right now. We're not paying for something that only gives us "just" chat with better-by-design UX and chat workflows. Teams is free and fits this purpose, at least in the eyes of an executive.

Slack's developer environment (outside of Grid features, the new "Premium Workflows" and "Next Generation Platform") is first-class.

At the very least start with some webhook integrations.

Also your Privacy Policy has no mention of Amazon Web Services, I think you might want to review your "DATA PROCESSORS / SERVICE PROVIDERS" section.

Also, are you planning on offering single-tenant options? Not a fan of our chat data sitting with a bunch of other organisations.

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cheeseblubber 4 hours ago | parent | next [-]

Definitely agree on developer community and third party integrations. That is our main focus after this launch. Building just a good quality chat tool took quite a bit of time but we understand how important the dev ecosystem is.

Thanks for checking the privacy policy will update to include AWS!

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llamaLord 1 hour ago | prev | next [-]

To be clear, this is not a dig, but I love that we're basically coming full-circle back to email, just without any of the decentralization and inter-tenant interoperability that comes natively to email.

All we need now is for someone to give every Linen user an externally accessible handle that allows cross-tenant invites or 'thread sharing' and we'll have officially closed the loop.

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cheeseblubber 1 hour ago | parent | next [-]

Thanks! Linen is secretly email in disguise. We have played around with syncing with email clients which would let you manage all your messages and notifications from one client.

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stonogo 1 hour ago | parent | prev | next [-]

Taking the long road back to Delta Chat? <https://delta.chat/en/>

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Some technical notes: This is actually a fork of Linen.dev, an SEO-friendly Slack alternative for communities. We originally built Linen.dev with Next.js but ultimately found it quite limiting when we wanted to make things fast and responsive and have custom caches. For Linen.team, there wasn't a need for server rendering since we didn't need our product to be SEO-friendly. We removed Next.js and replaced it with Vite and Express, which simplified our code quite a bit since we didn't have the legacy requirements. We also spent quite a bit of time optimizing the performance and query so that it is much faster than the previous version of Linen. Our plan is to open source Linen.team as well; we need to do some repo clean-up first.

Finally, after a year, we actually reduced our client bundle size from 500kb to less than 400kb. You can see our post on bundle optimization here: <https://news.ycombinator.com/item?id=35718417>.

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stopachka 8 hours ago | parent | next [-]

It's interesting to hear about the move away from NextJS. How does your express api look?

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emilos 8 hours ago | root | parent | next [-]

It's a restful api that doesn't hold any state, we use jwt (jsonwebtoken) for auth. It's essentially a collection of routers for different actions. Mostly crud, with few exceptions like webhooks, auth flow. We often use middlewares e.g. for things like validation. Everything is written in ts/tsx so the client/server do share types. We serialize data to use it in a standardized/known format in the UI.

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qudat 4 hours ago | root | parent | next [-]

If you like the middleware system in express you might be interested in starfx, which implements the same middleware but for fetching and data synchronization in the FE. It has a simple but powerful state management system and leverages structured concurrency to manage side effects.

<https://github.com/neurosnap/starfx>

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sgarland 1 hour ago | prev | next [-]

> 400 KB

Can/will you maintain this devotion to optimization when shipping a a desktop client? If it could not be Electron, that would be great.

I love the differentiation between ! and @. There are many times when I want to inform a group without bothering them.

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We actually tried shipping a desktop client with Tauri and Rust. It helped with initial bundle size but performance and resource consumption was kind of similar. We also ran in to issues with the api's being bit limiting. Most likely we'll revisit the desktop client with Tauri but depending on how mature the api is we may have to resort to electron.

Our bundle size has actually only gotten smaller since we've shipped our first version. We know it will gradually grow but we try to be disciplined in not using too many external dependencies

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arcza 4 hours ago | prev | next [-]

Another small suggestion - 14 days seems way too short for a trial; most SaaS trials are 30 and I often end up emailing for extensions before onboarding a new vendor. This is not a cost skimp, it's to avoid making the wrong decision.

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stavros 4 hours ago | prev | next [-]

How does Linen compare to Zulip?

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One thing that we wanted to do was to create a design that was more modern and a bit more familiar to the average Slack/Discord user. I think zulip is great but can be a bit more overwhelming. We wanted to keep a familiar UX as much as possible while giving the benefits of a thread first experience.

Secondly we are a bit more opinionated in thread management. Our inbox is designed to get to an inbox zero state. We have things like !mention vs @mention which helps with urgent vs non urgent communication.

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stavros 4 hours ago | root | parent | next [-]

That sounds good, thanks!

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Aeolun 4 hours ago | prev | next [-]

This looks really nice. It's similar to Slack, but still has it's own distinctive feel.

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memset 4 hours ago | prev | next [-]

Awesome! I've been desperately looking for a slack alternative. In part I want something more lightweight, and nowadays there are so many little upsells that get in the way.

My biggest use case is talking to people on other teams (Slack Connect.) How is that managed here?

Also, what is the narrative around adding users and billing? I hate that every time I add someone to slack for a project need to make a buying decision (are they a full user, guest user, active vs inactive...) Is it possible to pay for users when they're active, and not have to worry about managing seats when projects end?

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One of the pain point I've actually seen for Slack is Slack Connect becomes disorganized very quickly to the point where you need a custom solution to manage it. I think it is a symptom of the overall problem with Slack. Since Linen is thread first it makes manage these conversations much easier. We do plan on shipping our own version of Slack Connect or even integrating with existing channels.

Pricing wise we're still figuring out. I do think paying for active users is a likely direction though!

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arcza 4 hours ago | prev | next [-]

Can this be self managed? Major plus if so.

Not everyone goes to the cloud by default. There are many orgs out there that want full data sovereignty for better infosec without relying on someone else's servers.

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dandigangi 4 hours ago | prev | next [-]

Going to check this out for funzies. I do love Slack threads but not something you can force. Discord threads have much to be desired in their UX/UI. My least "favorite" of theirs in fact. Losing the colocation of information is extremely negative impacting to an organization.

Slack's UI with activity and all that went down significantly from their latest update. Shocked they haven't switched back. Community feedback from what I gathered is extremely unhappy users.

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Aeolun 4 hours ago | prev | next [-]

When I sign up it asks me for a display name, but after I sign up it has completely ignored that and instead added the part before the @ in my email address.

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mdaniel 3 hours ago | parent | next [-]

heh, makes me wonder if they're stepping on the same bug I reported <https://github.com/Linen-dev/linen.dev/issues/814>

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iimblack 3 hours ago | prev | next [-]

Any tests done on scaling? How's the search? Maybe because of the nature of slack but I use advanced filters very frequently to find old messages.

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[cheeseblubber 2 hours ago](#) | [parent](#) | [next \[-\]](#)

We've actually done test on scaling. This is a fork of Linen.dev which had community of up to 50k members. So we've tested this well. Search is an on going feature we are working on. We're going to enhance it with more embedding like search functionality.

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How do you distinguish your product from Twist? I like the two levels of mentions, but that's not enough to convince me to jump by itself.

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Any reason you're using rest for a chat client? Maybe socket scaling limitations of the node/express stack. Not as bad as php whci slack is still mostly written in, but hard to beat the mostly Erlang stack for discord. It also makes it's lot easier for bot dev having a two way connection without the hassle of ngrok etc.

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We use Elixir for websocket/real-time updates but crud stuff like settings, creating channels etc are mostly rest.

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[hwbehrens 4 hours ago](#) | [prev \[-\]](#)

Do you have any plans to release a desktop-compatible bundle?

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[cheeseblubber 4 hours ago](#) | [parent \[-\]](#)

Yes we will! We've shipped a desktop client previously with Rust(Tauri) but their api's were a bit lacking. We'll be revisiting it very soon

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