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Slack's New Threaded Messages Tame Your Meandering Chats

Finally. Slack has just released threaded messaging, a way to connect related messages within a chatroom.



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WIRED'S BEST SLACK channel is called #cookiechat. It's a place to discuss life's important questions, like "Thin Mints or Samoas," and to alert fellow cookie fans where that day's office treats are hiding. But sometimes, the conversation breaks from strictly cookies-ice-cream-and-cake related topics, and wanders into the territory of pastries. Now, a new Slack feature lets WIRED's cookie chatters---and OK, all Slack users---pursue divergent, yet equally essential, flavors of thought without distracting from a room's larger, occasionally delicious mission.

Slack's new trick is called *threaded messaging*, and it's a way to connect related messages inside a given chatroom. The feature rolls out to about 10 percent of Slack users today, but the company says the goal is to get the feature live across *all* Slack users within a week.

Using threaded messaging seems intuitive enough. To begin a detailed discussion on a particular topic---say, croissants---you just hover over the first croissant-related message in a chatroom and click on "Start a thread." A sidebar to the right of the Slack room launches so you can add your reply.

In the main Slack room, you'll see little thumbnail headshots of those participating in the thread, plus the number of replies. You can click to expand and see all the replies to a thread, which are arranged chronologically. Every time you add your own response, you automatically "follow" that thread, and you'll get updates for all the threads you follow in a new category called "All Threads," which appears on the right-hand sidebar of Slack. The category lights up when new messages are added to the threads you follow, but you'll only see a numbered alert if you're named directly in a thread reply. If for some reason you need to let all the participants of the channel know about your latest response, a checkbox in the right panel lets you "also send" a message to the whole channel.

SLACK

“There are specific workflows that customers have where it can be challenging to have depth in a flat, conversational format,” says Paul Rosania, a product lead for the feature at Slack.

New Threads

It seems like a pretty simple update, but it took two years to create; this launch marks the fourth iteration of how Slack imagines threads could work. Rosania says it may not make sense for every channel to have threads in it. But he also thinks there could be new and creative use cases for them. Within Slack itself, some engineers have used threaded messaging to track the various bugs reported to the company. If a coder had particular expertise in resolving a certain kind of bug, that team member could respond directly (or ping the right person) without interrupting the larger flow of discussion. With threads, Slack users can also scroll past multiple topics to find the ones most relevant to them, cutting down on the time needed to find messages in a more free-flowing chat.

moment, it's under tremendous pressure to keep innovating. Nine-year-old note-taking app Evernote just rolled out a major reboot of its app, and is eyeing an AI-powered future. Tech giant Salesforce agreed to purchase productivity powerhouse Quip last summer. Not to mention, one of the main things threaded messages seems to want to accomplish---tracking the progress of several projects---is the very premise of the popular to-do app Trello.

Threaded messages alone won't fend off the competition, but it's another feature Slack can boast about. More importantly, it can evolve along with its users. “We expect that threads will reveal more about how Slack can be used in the workplace to be productive,” Rosania says. In the meantime, at the very least, threads should at least help WIRED’s cookie fans accomplish the stated motto of the channel. Heck, maybe we'll branch out into sharing recipes next.

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