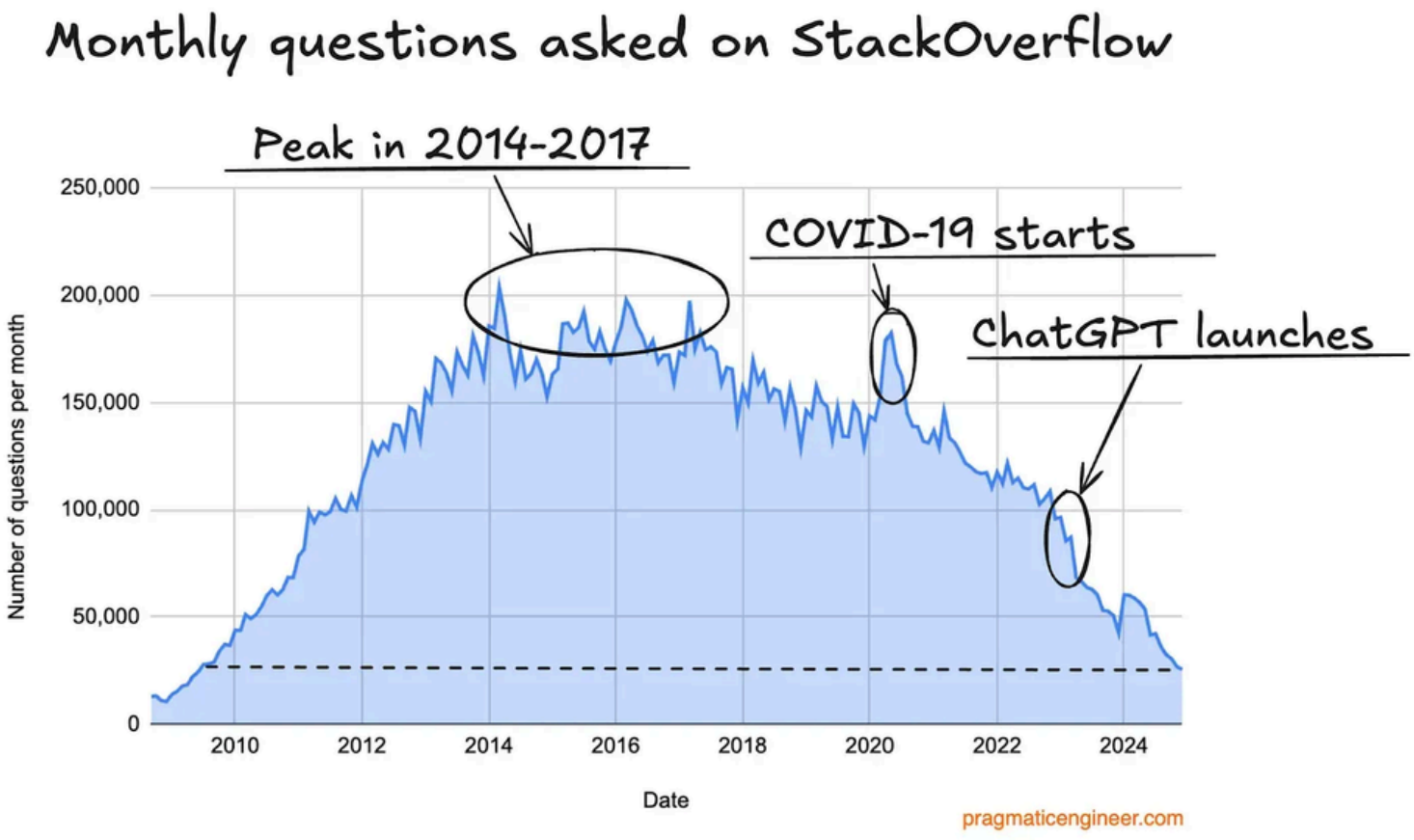
Stack overflow is almost dead

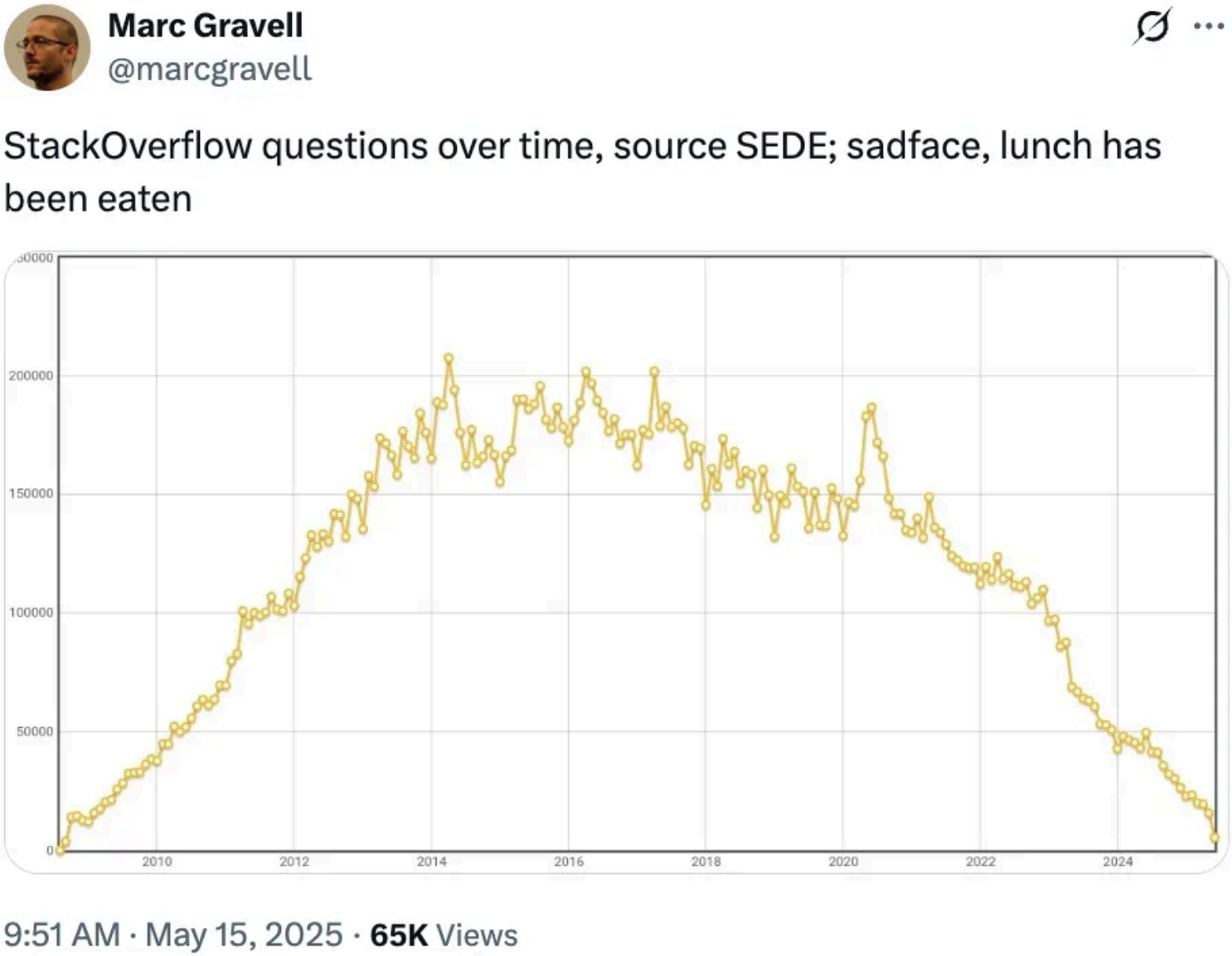
Originally published in The Pragmatic Engineer Newsletter.

Four months ago, we asked Are LLMs making Stack Overflow irrelevant? Data at the time suggested that the answer is likely "yes:"



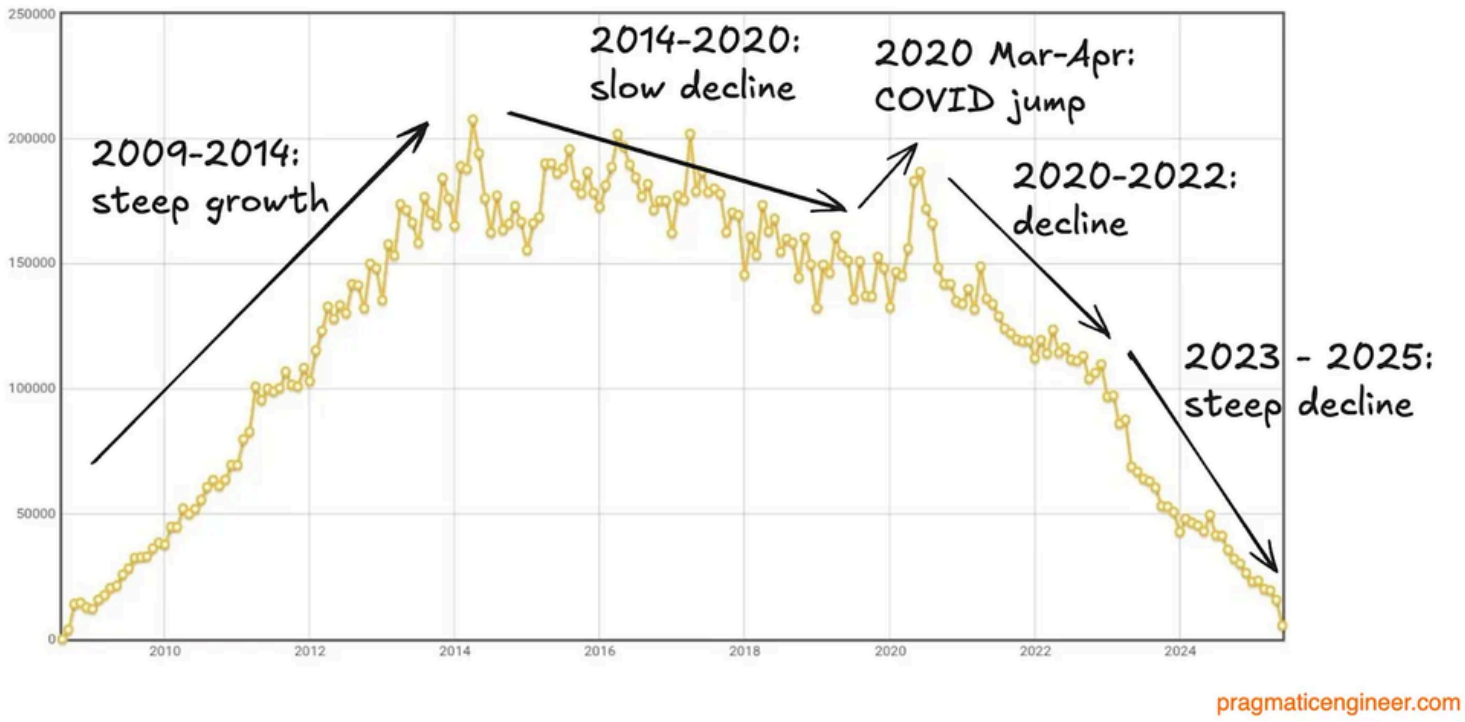
Number of questions asked per month on StackOverflow. Data source: this Gist

Since then, things at Stack Overflow went from bad to worse. The volume of questions asked has nearly dried up, new data shows:



Questions have slumped to levels last seen when Stack Overflow launched in 2009. Source: Stack Overflow Data Explorer (SEDE) / Marc Gravell on X

This graph was shared by Marc Gravell, a top 10 all-time contributor to Stack Overflow. Let's look closer at the data:



Decline started around 2014

You can run the full query to get the data here.

A few things stand out:

- **2014:** questions started to decline, which was also when Stack Overflow significantly improved moderator efficiency. From then, questions were closed faster, many more were closed, and "low quality" questions were removed more efficiently. This tallies with my memory of feeling that site moderators had gone on a power trip by closing legitimate questions. *I stopped asking questions around this time because the site felt unwelcome.*
- **March 2020:** a big jump in traffic due to pandemic-induced lockdowns and forced remote working. Instead of asking colleagues, devs Googled and visited Stack Overflow for help
- **June 2020:** questions start to decline, faster than before. *Even though we did not know at the time, this was stilll two years from ChatGPT launching!*
- **June 2021:** Stack Overflow sold for $1.8B to private equity investor, Prosus. *In hindsight, the founders – Jeff Atwood and Joel Spolsky – sold with near-perfect timing, before terminal decline.*

- **November 2022:** as soon as ChatGPT came out, the number of questions asked declined rapidly. ChatGPT is faster and it's trained on StackOverflow data, so the quality of answers is similar. Plus, ChatGPT is polite and answers all questions, in contrast to StackOverflow moderators.
- **May 2025:** the number of monthly questions is as low as when Stack Overflow launched in 2009.

In January, I asked if LLMs are making Stack Overflow irrelevant. We now have an answer, and sadly, it's a "yes." The question seems to be *when* Stack Overflow will wind down operations, or the owner sells the site for comparative pennies, not *if* it will happen.

Even without LLMs, it's possible StackOverflow would have eventually faded into irrelevance – perhaps driven by moderation policy changes or something else that started in 2014. LLMs have certainly accelerated its fall. It's a true shame for a site that helped so many developers get "unstuck" – while successfully gamifying helping other developers on the internet in the early 2010s.

I'll certainly miss having a space on the internet to ask questions and receive help – not from an AI, but from fellow, human developers. While Stack Overflow's days are likely numbered: I'm sure we'll see spaces where developers hang out and help each other continue to be popular – whether they are in the form of Discord servers, WhatsApp or Telegram groups, or something else.

Update on 15 May: updated the last two paragraphs to make it a more positive outlook. I really did love StackOverflow from when it launched, and it made a big and positive difference in my professional growth in those early years – I still remember the pride of getting my first upvote on first a question, and eventually on more and more answers as well. Too bad that all good things come to an end. Thanks to Andrew for his thoughtful note.

This was one out of five topics from latest The Pulse issue. The full issue additionally covers:

- **Industry pulse.** Google's CEO doing customer support, coding model recommendations from Cursor, AI dev tools company valuations soar, OpenAI still a nonprofit – but with more clarity on stock, and will we get an answer to whether copyrighted materials can be used to train AI models?
- **Could big job cuts at Microsoft become more regular?** 6,000 people (about 3% of staff) let go at Microsoft. Based on the company's history, mass layoffs happen more than in the past. Satya Nadella is an empathetic leader, but also doesn't shy away from axing jobs.
- **Google: high performers get more bonus, low performers get less.** Not exactly a controversial change, but another example of the search giant becoming similar to other tech companies. Places like Uber have implemented this approach before.
- **Notes on rolling out Cursor and Claude Code.** A 40-person dev team at Workforce.com with a Ruby on Rails codebase started to use AI tools and agents. Results so far are pretty good: productivity gains are real if modest, and there's learnings on how to best use them from cofounder, Alex Ghiculescu.

Read the full issue here.

Subscribe to my weekly newsletter to get articles like this in your inbox. It's a pretty good read - and the #1 software engineering newsletter on Substack.

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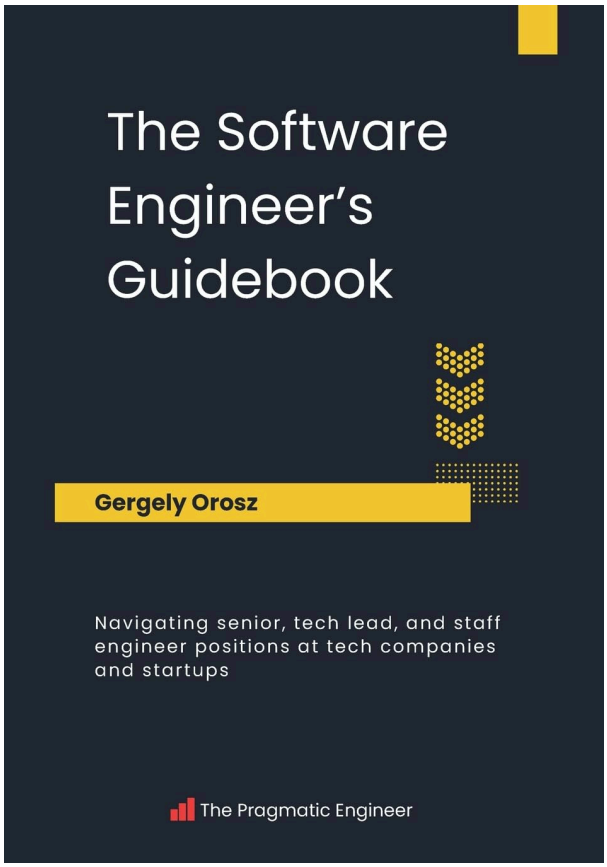
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The Software Engineer's Guidebook

I wrote The Software Engineer's Guidebook. Here is what Tanya Reilly, senior principal engineer and author of The Staff Engineer's Path says about it:

> "From performance reviews to P95 latency, from team dynamics to testing, Gergely demystifies all aspects of a software career. This book is well named: **it really does feel like the missing guidebook for the whole industry.**"



Get the book here.

Annual conference talk

Every year, I do one conference talk in the US, and one in Europe. **My next conference talk is at LDX3 New York, on 15 September 2026.** Previous talks:

- Slow down to speed up - Craft Conference, 2026
- Software engineering with LLMs: reality check - LDX3, London, 2025

Gergely Orosz
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