

Jabber: An Introduction

Peter Saint-Andre

Feb 22, 2002

Instant messaging (IM) — usually considered one-to-one messaging as opposed to groupchat applications like IRC — is definitely one of the emerging “killer applications” of the internet. There are well over 100 million IM users today and that number is growing fast. Unfortunately, the vast majority of those people use proprietary IM services from the likes of AOL, Yahoo!, and MSN. Aside from a few [free] open-source clients that have been written to interact with those closed networks, the philosophy of software freedom is nowhere to be found in the IM world.

Except, that is, for **Jabber**. In early 1998, developer *Jeremie Miller* became fed up with the closed nature of existing IM services. In true open-source fashion, he decided to “scratch an itch” by creating an alternative, truly open IM network. Following the successful model of SMTP, he learned C and began writing an instant messaging server, then recruited other developers to write clients that would interact with the server.

The project has been highly successful. Thousands of Jabber servers are now running on the public Internet and on private intranets, with over a million people using Jabber for their instant communication needs. Jabber clients exist for just about every major computing platform (you can find a list at www.jabbercentral.org). There are Jabber coding libraries for Perl, Python, Java, and C++. Jeremie’s jabberd server (available at jabberd.jabberstudio.org and dual-licensed un-

der the GPL and the OSI-approved Jabber Open Source License) has seen over 50,000 downloads.

Furthermore, because the Jabber protocols are built from the ground up with XML, Jabber is more than just basic IM: it is an extensible framework for **near-real-time messaging**. That framework has been extended to XML-RPC, SOAP, content syndication, network management, gaming, and a number of other non-IM applications. The protocols are now managed by the Jabber Software Foundation (formed on the model of Apache and Python) and were recently submitted as an open standard to the IETF.

Despite that success, there are still plenty of opportunities for helping with Jabber, from simply using Jabber, to running public Jabber servers, to developing clients and libraries, to helping out with the core jabberd server. To find out more, visit <http://www.jabber.org/>

About the Author Peter Saint-Andre is Executive Director of the Jabber Software Foundation and the documentation lead for Jabber. He may be contacted via email or IM at stpeter@jabber.org

We have set up a column about instant messaging technologies, and this article is the first one of our column. — FSM
--