Cutting Some Slack: Decoding IRC

SeaGL 2016

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Introduction

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About me

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~20 years in tech, most of which involved with open source in some way

Currently a senior software engineering manager

Will cover

- What even is IRC?
- The Foundations of IRC
- Commands
- IRC Etiquette
- Wrap up

The content of this talk is driven by the results of a survey I conducted. Over 200 people responded providing their suggestions for what should be covered in an introduction to IRC.

Will not cover

- Logging
- Persistance
- Bots
- Customizations
- Server administration

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Slides are already available!

http://archive.org/details/seagl2016-irc

I'll be showing a bunch of commands. No need to take notes right now, since the slides are already available.

Just take a photo of this slide & follow along if you'd like

I'll show this URL again at the end of the presentation, so don't worry if you don't get it now

Please save all questions for the end

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What even is IRC?

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Internet Relay Chat

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One of the earliest realtime chat systems

Jarkko Orkarinen

- Invented in 1987
- Made freely available
- Spread over the world
- Thanks, Jarkko!

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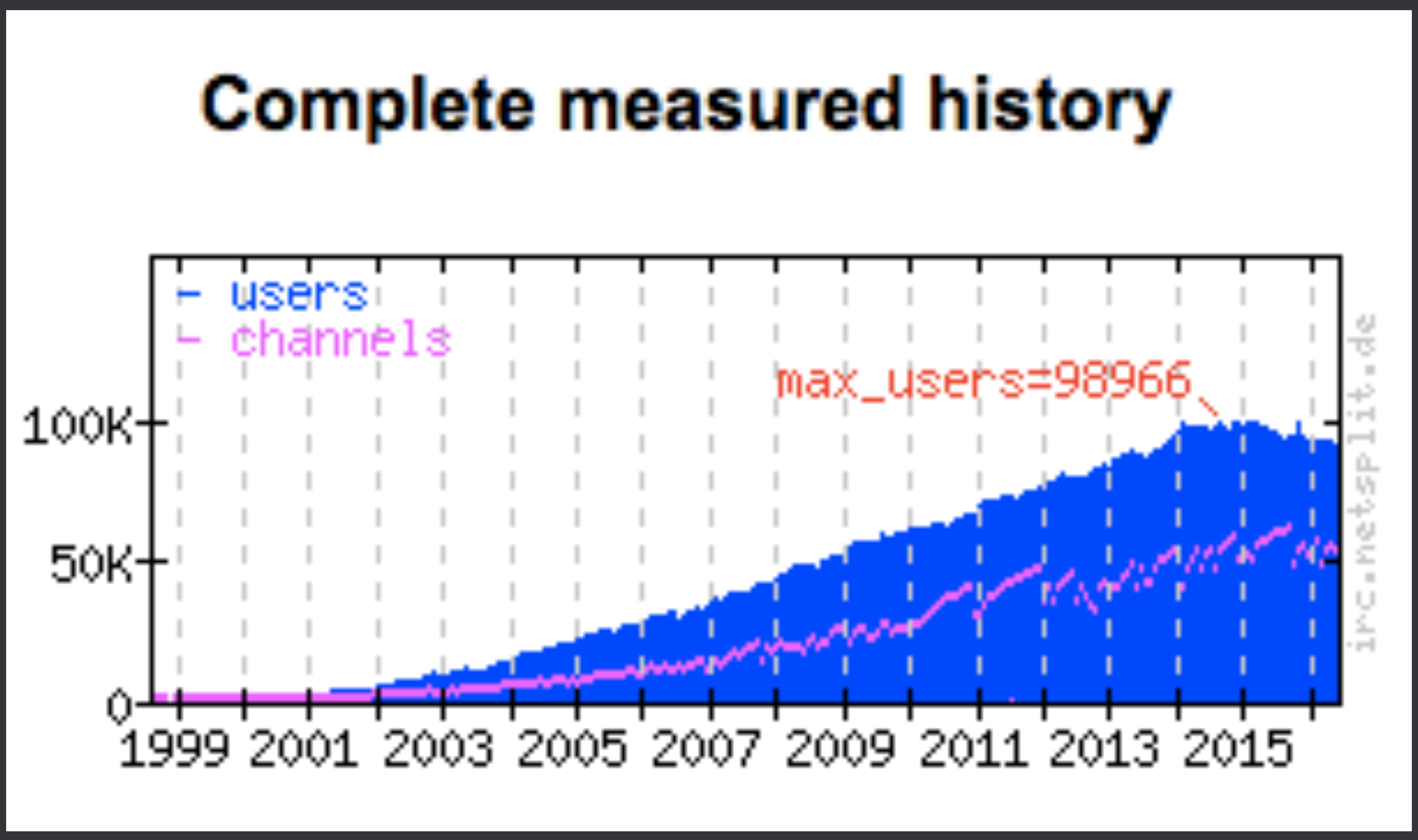
Intended to duplicate BBS/forum functionality, but saw the value of IRC & focused on that instead

Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web in 1989, so IRC has been arund even longer than the web.

Popularity



Most IRC usage hit its peak around 2004 or 2005, with millions of users. Became very popular with video gamers for a while (QuakeNet)

Has been on the wane since then

The Freenode IRC network--which supports hundreds of free/open source projects--is the exception to the rule with over 80K users and 50K channels

Criticisms

- Arcane & opaque to learn
- Not logged by default
- No persistent presence by default
- Not shiny

Whenever I tell people, "Hey, ping me on IRC" they usually come back with a litany of criticisms of the service

Benefits

- Ubiquitous & Open to anyone with an internet connection
- It's lightweight with very low bandwidth requirements
- Loggable
- Scriptable
- Discoverable
- Free (in all senses of the word)

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IRC is still the most popular real time chat option for free/open source collaborators and users.

If you're planning to use or participate in a free/open source software project, you should learn at least a bit of IRC.

Created by Sergey Demushkin
from Noun Project

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The elephant in the room is that at least one of the criticisms about IRC is correct: It IS arcane and opaque to learn. But that's OK. I'm here to help.

The Foundations of IRC

All you need to participate in IRC...

- A Network
- A Client
- A Nickname
- A Channel (optional, really)
- Oh, and an internet connection

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Networks

- Collections of servers
- Only connect to the network, not to a specific server

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niven.freenode.net

Popular FOSS IRC Networks

- OFTC (Open & Free Technology Community)
- Mozilla
- irc.perl.org
- Freenode

oftc: debian, tor, ceph, gcc...

mozilla: all mozilla projects, a lot of Rust

perl: all Perl projects

freenode: oh so many things, incl OpenStack

Clients

- Very many options; A very personal choice (like text editor)
- Windows: mIRC
- Linux: Irssi or weechat (usually through a screen session)
- OS X: Textual

Based upon that survey I did, the following are the most popular IRC clients by desktop platform:

My IRC Client

- IRCCloud: http://irccloud.com
- Web, Android, iOS, all desktops (Electron app)
- Seamlessly switch between devices
- Scrollback, persistence, integration with other services
- Great for new IRC users & experienced alike
- (I get no kickback here; I just really like it)

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Nicknames

- AKA "nick"
- Your IRC identity
- Valid chars: alphanumeric, ;[]_^{|}`\
- Max of 9 characters…but not really

RFC says the max is 9, but networks support more. It's 16 on Freenode.

Channels

- Chatroom: only those in the channel can see/ participate in the conversation
- Channel names typically start with a **#** or a **##**
- Can be hidden/private/invite-only, but typically open to everyone
- Examples: **`#seagl`**, **`#opensource.com`**, **`#conservancy`**, **`##openstack-social`**

Convention: # is for "official" channels, ## for more casual channels

IRC

Commands

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Generally...

- Start with a **/**
- Often accept/require at least one argument

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I'll give you several examples in the following slides

Registering your nick

- Makes sure you are always you on IRC
- Nickserv -> nickname management service
- `/msg NickServ REGISTER password youremail@example.com`

Must be using your chosen nick when you run this command

Don't forget, the slides are already available so you can get this command easily & don't need to note it right now

Signing in (identifying) with your nick

- Not required, but nice to do
- `/msg NickServ IDENTIFY nick nickserv_password`

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Changing your nick

- Can change your nick at any time
- Takes effect **network-wide**, not just on that channel
- `/nick new_nick`
- `/nick old_nick`

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Joining (or creating) a channel

- `/join channelname`
- Include the **#** or **##** in the channel name
- No channel by that name? It'll create a new one
- **`/join #seagl`**

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Leaving a channel

- `/leave channelname`
- Or, if you're in the channel, simply `/leave`

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Saying something

- In general, just type a non-command & hit Enter
- You can also use the **`/say`** command, but that's rare:
  - **`/say /nick is the command for changing your nickname`**

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"Doing" something

- You can send "actions" during conversation using the **`/me`** command
- **`/me waves to the audience!`**
- `vmbrasseur waves to the audience!`

Sending a private message

- A one on one conversation
- Private but may be logged by either you or the other party (or both)
- Please ask permission before PMing someone for the first time
- **`/msg nick`** to start the conversation

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Getting more information about people

- The **`/who`** and **`/whois`** commands can return more information about people
- Limited to the information they wish to share

- `/whois vmbrasseur`

Marking yourself as away

- Step away from the keyboard? Set an away status
- **`/away`** or **`/away message`** if you want to give people more information
- **/away** again to remove the status (or **`/back`**)

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Those symbols before some nicks

- **@**: An operator (someone with authority in that channel)
- **+**: "Voiced" (not used often)

Learning more

- /help

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IRC Etiquette

Each channel will have their own particular culture. Don't assume they're all the same.

Generally speaking...

- IRC is a welcoming place full of helpful people
- As with any community, please pay attention to the culture & mores
- In case of jerks, please report it. Tolerance just breeds more of them.
- IRC is both real time & asynchronous. If you have a question, please give several hours (or days) for an answer.

Channel culture

- Always read the topic (**`/topic`**), all links in it, and adhere to what those say
- Lurk in the channel for a while to get a sense of it before speaking

Interactions

- Mentioning a nick pings. Don't ping w/o content (aka "naked ping").
- If you have a question, please ask it. Don't ask for permission to do so.
- Large text dumps are unfriendly. Please use a pastebin or a gist instead.
- Changing your nick to show away status (**`/nick vmbrasseur_away`**) makes communication difficult. Please use **`/away`** instead.

Writing style

- Try not to put an **@** before nicks. It's not needed and some IRCers can be defensive about it.
- Character limits aren't a practical concern on IRC. Please write complete words/sentences rather than txtspeak.
- ALL CAPS IS SHOUTING. USE IT SPARINGLY, PLEASE.
- IRC supports ANSI colors. Just because you can do something doesn't mean you should. ;-)

Wrap up

Gratitude

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@0x2ba22e11
@2bithacker
@JackScottAU
@Keltounet
@TwoMice
@adereth
@antimagical
@ara4n
@baconandcoconut
@cra
@didtux
@edgararout
@iamjkeating
@jasonaowen
@jmacdotorg
@johngoulah
@josh_triplett
@jschauma
@l_h_hacker
@mjbrender
@moehrenfeld
@nahumshalman
@paultag
@qedunham
@robothiveirc
@softfennec
@spedru
@the_mcjones
@wholemilk
@zevlag
Chiper
Corbin
DeeHants
Elleo
Embolalia
Gareth
GheRIvero
JayF
LGnome
Morgan / notmorgan
Paul2
Perigrin
Pomax
Sarayan
StevenK
Syncros
WOOARGH
Zeeek
afresh1
ahu
alh
alkadiene
alvarezp
asgrim
auggy / mmmpork
brainwane
bugZPDX
bwinton
chargrill
cinayakoshka
cjm
clokep
crinkle
czajkowski
darkfader
davek
dha
dhellmann
docaedo
downey
drzz
frew
gizmomathboy
glasnt
gnomon
grifferz
halpychan
igalic / meena
j1mc
j3nnn1
j^2
kragniz
lucyw
lukasa
mhayden
mies_nl
mikedoherty_ca
mythmon
nibalizer
nightfly
nullstream
operatic
pleia2
preaction
ramak
sarahsharp
sergeyb
sergio
sungo
tfm
trs80
tsimonq2
ubu
vilmibm
zmoylan-pi
zuzak

Survey respondents! Some are Twitter handles.
Some are IRC nicks. All are wonderful for helping.

Image Credits

- : Andrey Vasiliev from the Noun Project
- : Gregor Črešnar from the Noun Project
- : Mackey Guenther from the Noun Project
- : Sergey Demushkin from the Noun Project
- Jarkko Orkarinen image: http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=185&artikel=6290346
- Freenode stats: http://irc.netsplit.de/networks/statistics.php?net=freenode

Resources and Q&A

http://archive.org/details/seagl2016-irc

- Slides
- Links for more information
- Video (when available)

Tweet me feedback! @vmbrasseur

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