

Centericq

Communications Center

One friend uses ICQ, another only Jabber as a matter of principle, and a third has installed AOL Instant Messaging. Centericq provides a uniform interface for all of these, and puts an end to chat chaos.

BY FREDERIK BIJLSMA



happen to any IM service any day, if the service uses a proprietary protocol. The only completely free platform is Jabber <http://www.jabber.org/>, which has the added advantage of using SSL encrypted connections.

Installation

Ensure that you are *root* and type the following command

```
rpm -ivh centericq-4.9.9-1.i386.rpm
```

to install the package. Debian stable users are also in for an easy time. Simply type

No matter whether they are planning a visit to the pub or their next vacation, there are some people who use Instant Messaging (IM) for all their planning. Colleagues at work may use the same chat technology to discuss things, although their offices are miles apart. And as these services are free, with the possible exception of Internet airtime, the whole thing is cheap to boot.

In contrast to IRC (Internet Relay Chat) which is an open standard, Instant Messaging was originally invented by the major Internet players. This explains the abundance of IM protocols, and the number of commercial clients sponsored by advertising revenues. In the worst case, you might need to install a separate software for each of your chat buddies.

Fortunately, a few Open Source programs that provide a solution to this dilemma have made their way onto the market by now, and the text-based Cen-

tericq tool is just one of them. Although the name would suggest otherwise, Centericq not only handles the ICQ protocol but also supports Yahoo, AIM (AOL IM), Jabber, IRC, and LiveJournal.

The developers, spearheaded by the project's initiator, Konstantin Klyagin, were forced to remove support for the MSN IM service, as Microsoft refuses third-party clients access to its network. Of course, this is something that might

```
echo "deb http://debian.speedblue.org/stable ./" >> /etc/apt/sources.list
apt-get update
apt-get install centericq
```

to retrieve the latest package off the Internet and install the package. If your distributor does not provide a suitable package, you can always resort to manually compiling and installing the

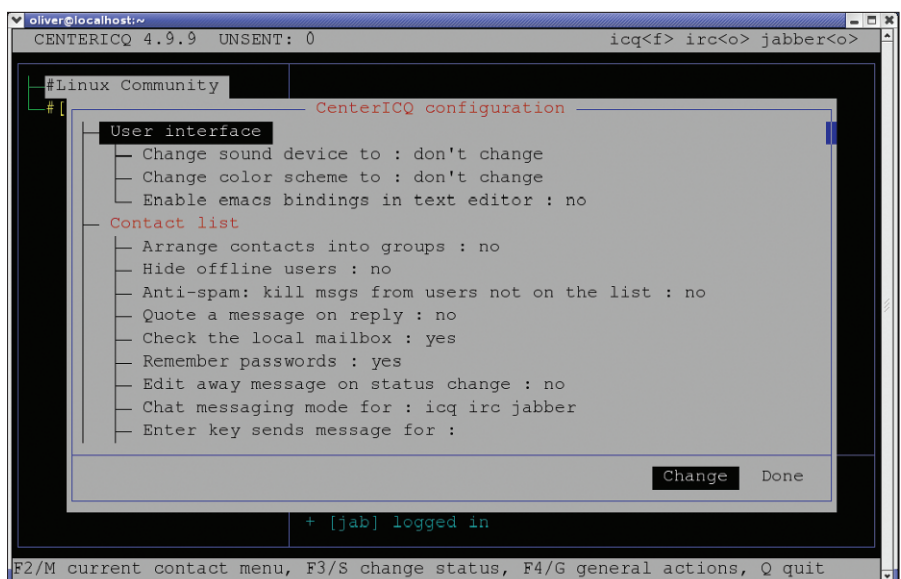


Figure 1: Configuration menu.

Out of the Box

There are thousands of tools and utilities for Linux. "Out of the Box" takes a pick of the bunch and each month suggests a little program, which we feel is either absolutely indispensable or unduly ignored.

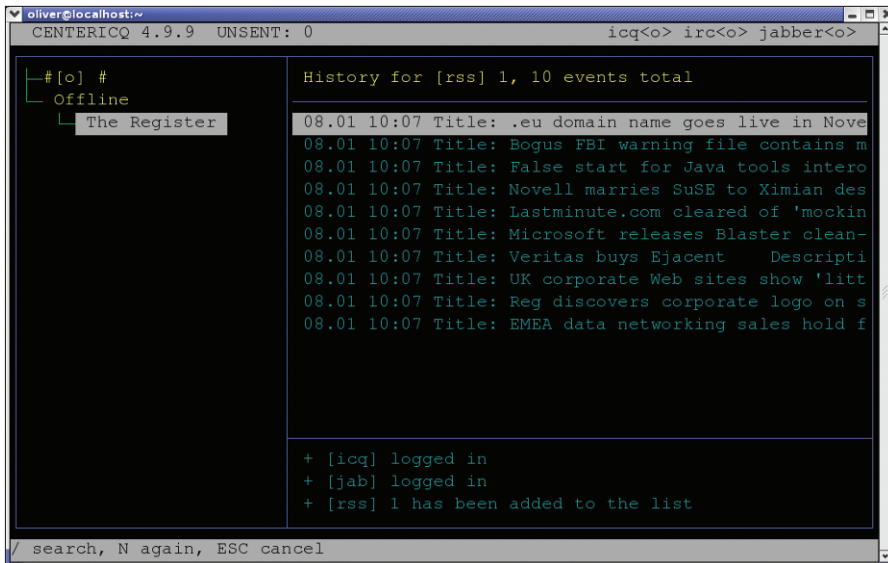


Figure 2: Integrating Linux Community News.

program. Up-to-date packages are available from [1] and [2].

```
tar xjf centericq-4.9.9.tar.bz2
cd centericq-4.9.9
./configure
make
su
make install
```

Talk to me

After completing the installation, you can launch the program by typing *centericq* on the command line. If you are plagued by unwanted line-wraps and faulty graphics, you can specify the *-a* switch to enable **ASCII** output for the program. If you launch the program from an *xterm* (under X11, for example), you might have some difficulty reading the text. To improve readability, select the *Enable Reverse Video* option, by holding down the [Ctrl] key and clicking the center mouse button in the terminal window. When first launched, Centericq prompts you to define a few options, although you can opt to accept the defaults (see Figure 1). You can press the [Right arrow] key and confirm by hitting

GLOSSARY

ASCII: *The American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) is a standard that maps numerical codes to the letters of the alphabet. ASCII includes a standard character set and an extended character set with control characters and accented or foreign-language characters.*

Enter to start managing your IM accounts. You need to supply a username and password for each service. If you have user credentials, this is the place to enter them.

But don't worry if you do not have any user credentials. Centericq can register you as a new user for any chat protocol apart from AIM and Yahoo. To register, simply select the *Register* entry in the menu for the service. The program will prompt you to enter your email address and name, for example, and set you up with your new account after registering. AOL and Yahoo users need to register using the official client first, and can then transfer their data to Centericq. Then select *Done*, by pressing the [Right arrow] key and hitting Enter, to launch the interface proper. If Centericq fails to connect, you might like to check your firewall settings, and possibly enable the required protocol. More information on doing this is available at [3].

The interface is well-organized. Your contacts, that is the other chat participants, are shown on the left. The program indicates the status of each known contact: typically online, away, or not available. The active menu item is highlighted in white. You can use the four arrow keys to navigate the entries. Hotkeys (see Table 1) make it easy for you to get in touch with your contacts.

Centericq Calling

You can press [g] and then select *Find/add users* to add a new contact. Of

Table 1: Centericq Shortcuts

Key	Description
[m]	Menu for a contact
[s]	Modify your own online status
[g]	Modify preferences (IM accounts, new contacts)
[q]	Quit program
[Esc]	Quit menu
[\][v]	Vertical tabulator

course, each IM protocol provides its own search facilities. For example, ICQ allows you to search by country; this is something that Jabber cannot do. After you have specified your search criteria, the program will display a list of the chat accounts that match the search, and allow you to add them to your list of contacts. You can press [Esc] to quit the search menu and send a message to the contact found by the search. After completing your message, press [Ctrl-x] to send it (see Figure 1).

Besides chat functions, Centericq also has a News facility that allows you to subscribe to newsgroups and display their contents. To locate this facility, press the [g] key below *Link to RSS feed*. To keep up-to-date on Linux topics in future, you might like to add this URL [4]. Then choose *Linux Community* as the nickname, and Centericq will inform you of the latest developments, providing more material for chat sessions with your buddies. ■

INFO

- [1] Centericq: <http://konst.org.ua/centericq/>
- [2] Download archive and documentation: <http://www.centericq.de/>
- [3] Ports and hostnames for IM services: <http://centericq.de/docs/readme.php?mode=1&chapter=4.5>
- [4] The Linux security RSS Feed: http://www.linuxsecurity.com/linuxsecurity_articles.rdf

THE AUTHOR

Frederik Bijlsma is a student of economics. He lives near Berlin, Germany, and has been working as a self-employed Linux consultant since 2001.



You can contact him at frederik@killesberg.org.