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Instant Messaging - How to reach and communicate with the world using your computer keyboard

v1.0.2 (en), xiando

A guide to the best IM clients and servers

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1. Your network choices

Today the big Instant Message (IM) networks are Jabber, ICQ and MSN. MSN is the one most commonly used because it is tightly integrated in Windows, and most people use Windows.

- MSN <http://www.msn.com/>
 - ◆ Part of Windows, used by "most people"
 - ◆ Insecure and based on a closed protocol to prevent people from using third party clients
- ICQ <http://web.icq.com/>
 - ◆ Old and stable closed network, IDs based on numbers (i.e. 8923497982)
- Jabber <http://www.jabber.org/>
 - ◆ Open Source protocol
 - ◆ Secure, Supports SSL
- IRC - Internet relay chat
 - ◆ Many people use irc as their preferred im service. Why not?

Jabber is the only one based on open source. That is probably the one you want to be using. Jabber servers can be compiled with gateway support for AIM, ICQ and MSN, so if this is supported you can use a pure jabber client and still stay in touch with the rest of the world through the server.

The best IM clients are [gaim](#) ([manual page](#)) and [kopete](#). Both of them support all major IM networks. No matter what you *prefer* you really should acquire an account at all the major IM services, allowing people to contact you no matter what they choose.

- Public Jabber Servers <http://www.jabber.org/user/publicservers.php>

2. The Clients

2.1. All In One

Compare your actual needs with the clients support, not all clients support IRC or exotic IM networks like Yado-Yado.

2.1.1. BuddySpace

[BuddySpace](#) is a great [Java](#) client.

- OS: Java (Windows/Mac/Linux)
- JABBER/MSN/Y!/ICQ/AIM
- Does NOT support gnupg

2.1.2. gaim

[gaim](#) ([manual page](#)) is a gtk/gtk2 based IM client (with support for both KDEs and Gnomes panel). It has a large number of great optional plugins and supports all im networks. It supports filetransfer for some protocols, but not all.

2.1.3. kopete

Kopete is a all-in-one supports-all-protocols KDE im client.

There seems to be some problems with the jabber support in =kopete-0.7.4. Everything works smoothly with the Kopete provided by the KDE 3.3 kdenetwork package.

2.1.4. centericq

[centericq](#) is a ncurses-based client for terminal emulators. This makes it usable in [screen](#).

Despite the name centericq supports the Yahoo!/AIM/IRC/Jabber protocols thereby meeting all your IM needs. An excellent choice is you do not want a GUI IM client.

2.1.5. aytm

aytm (1,260 kB) stands for "Are you talking to me?" and is a universal chat client that lets you communicate with MSN, Jabber (supports SSL), IRC, ICQ, AIM and Yahoo!

Among the cool features are:

- File Transfer between Aytm clients (with any protocol)
- File Transfers to/from MSN and Yahoo! users, and receive only from AIM users
- MSN's Netmeeting integration, using GnomeMeeting

2.2. Jabber

There is a complete list of clients for all OS at Jabber :: Software :: Clients.

2.2.1. psi

Gentoo: emerge psi psi-themes

psi is a very good jabber-only client for both Linux and Windows. It is a good choice if you choose a Jabber server with *transport* support.

2.3. msn

2.3.1. kmess

kmess is a KDE client for MSN only.

2.3.2. amsn

amsn

2.4. icq

2.4.1. sim-icq

sim-icq is, as the name hints, a ICQ only client - and a great at that.

It is the only client that fully supports all of ICQs features, like sending SMS.

2.5. bitlbee - the irc gateway

BitlBee is not a client, but a gateway server that lets you connect to all your IM accounts and talk to your contacts as if they were irc users.

[msn, icq and jabber in your irc client](#)

3. Running IM servers

If you want a nice and stable in-house IM service, consider setting up a Jabber server. The free jabberd probably has all the features you need.

Check <http://www.jabber.org/admin/serverlist.php> for a list of all the Jabber servers available. Some of the commercial servers support Microsoft Exchange Integration and Netmeeting Integration, something the free jabberd does not.

Another, good old system for in-house IM is IRC. Having a closed irc server for IM with a channel for every floor/department/etc can be a very good, yet simple, way of doing quick in-house communication.

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