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SIP Extensions for Instant Messaging
draft-ietf-simple-im-01

Status of this Memo

This Internet-Draft will expire on January 16, 2002.

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Abstract

This document defines a SIP extension (a single new method) that supports Instant Messaging (IM).

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

This document defines an extension to SIP (RFC2543 [2]) to support Instant Messaging.

Instant messaging is defined as the exchange of content between a set of participants in real time. Generally, the content is short textual messages, although that need not be the case. Generally, the messages that are exchanged are not stored, but this also need not be the case. IM differs from email in common usage in that instant messages are usually grouped together into brief live conversations, consisting of numerous small messages sent back and forth.

Instant messaging as a service has been in existence within intranets and IP networks for quite some time. Early implementations include zephyr [1], the unix talk application, and IRC. More recently, IM has been used as a service coupled with presence and buddy lists; that is, when a friend comes online, a user can be made aware of this and have the option of sending the friend an instant message. The protocols for accomplishing this are all proprietary, which has seriously hampered interoperability. Furthermore, most of these protocols tightly couple presence and IM, due to the way in which the service is offered.

Despite the popularity of presence coupled IM services, IM is a separate application from presence. There are many ways to use IM outside of presence (for example, as part of a voice communications session). Another example are interactive games (possibly established with SIP - SIP can establish any type of session, not just voice or video); IM is already a common component of multiplayer online games. Keeping it apart from presence means it can be used in such ways. Furthermore, keeping them separate allows separate providers for IM and for presence service. Of course, it can always be offered by the same provider, with both protocols implemented into a single client application.

Along a similar vein, the mechanisms needed in an IM protocol are very similar to those needed to establish an interactive session - rapid delivery of small content to a user at their current location, which may, in general, be dynamically changing as the user moves. The similarity of needed function implies that existing solutions for initiation of sessions (namely, the Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) [2]) is an ideal base on which to build an IM protocol.

2. Changes Introduced in draft-ietf-simple-im-01

This version removes the idea of implicit sessions created by MESSAGE requests. MESSAGE requests are now completely stateless in themselves.

The version also some open issues: Bodies are not allowed in responses; an Accept header on a 415 response includes body types nested inside message/cpim bodies, all IM UAs MUST be able to receive message/cpim.

This draft introduces a new section for CPIM mapping. The authors expect this section will need further work to complete.

3. Changes Introduced in draft-ietf-simple-im-00

The draft name changed to reflect its status as a SIMPLE working group item. This version introduces no other changes.

4. Changes Introduced in draft-rosenberg-impp-im-01

This submission serves to track transition of the work on a SIP implementation of IM to the newly formed SIMPLE working group. It endeavors to capture the progress made in IMPP since the original submission (in particular, including the im: URL and the message/cpim body) and detail a set of open issues for the SIMPLE working group to address.

To support those goals, a great deal of the background and motivation material in the original text has been shortened or removed.

5. Terminology

Most of the terminology used here is defined in RFC2778 [4]. However, we duplicate some of the terminology from SIP in order to clarify this document:

User Agent (UA): A UA is a piece of software which is capable of initiating requests, and of responding to requests.

User Agent Server (UAS): A UAS is the component of a UA which receives requests, and responds to them.

User Agent Client (UAC): A UAC is the component of a UA which sends requests, and receives responses.

Registrar: A registrar is a SIP server which can receive and process REGISTER requests. These requests are used to construct address bindings.

6. Overview of Operation

When one user wishes to send an instant message to another, the sender formulates and issues a SIP request using the new MESSAGE

method defined by this document. The request URI of this request will normally be the im: URL of the party to whom the message is directed (see CPIM [15]), but can also be a normal SIP URL. The body of the request will contain the message to be delivered. This body can be of any MIME type, including "message/cpim" [16].

The request may traverse a set of SIP proxies using a variety of transport mechanism (UDP, TCP, even SCTP [5]) before reaching its destination. The destination for each hop is located using the address resolution rules detailed in the CPIM and SIP specifications (see Section 7 for more detail). During traversal, each proxy may rewrite the request URI based on available routing information.

Provisional and final responses to the request will be returned to the sender as with any other SIP request. Normally, a 200 OK response will be generated by the user agent of the request's final recipient. Note that this indicates that the user agent accepted the message, not that the user has seen it.

MESSAGE requests do not create any implied session. They do not in themselves establish a call leg, or any concept of call state. SIP proxies may not record-route MESSAGE requests.

7. The MESSAGE request

This section defines the syntax and semantics of this extension.

7.1 Method Definition

This specification defines a new SIP method, MESSAGE. The BNF for this method is:

```
Message  =  "MESSAGE"
```

As with all other methods, the MESSAGE method name is case sensitive.

Tables 1 and 2 extend Tables 4 and 5 of SIP by adding an additional column, defining the headers that can be used in MESSAGE requests and responses.

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