

Konversation

Talk to me!

Why roam afar, when the next Chat Room is so close? Virtual chatterboxes will simply love Konversation, the latest KDE IRC tool, for its user friendly desktop.

BY STEFANIE TEUFEL

Your telephone bill is too high, but you haven't exhausted your flatterate? Then, instead of grabbing the phone, chat with your distant friends via the keyboard. The IRC service, short for "Internet Relay Chat", is ideal for this.

For almost every subject, no matter how far-out, there will be an appropriate chat room, or *IRC channel*, available. And if there isn't, then you can create one for your subject. To do so, all you need is an IRC client and a connection to one of the many IRC servers on the Internet. Although there are many IRC clients available, we will be discussing *Konversation* [1], a KDE program built for this task, that stands out above all due to its ease of use.

"Extra Gear" (<http://extragear.kde.org/>) is a loose collection of KDE programs that for various reasons are not included in the **Core** KDE package. It can be downloaded at <http://konversation.sourceforge.net/>. As well as the source code, there are also several RPM packages for the best known distributions from Debian to SuSE up for grabs. Programs such as *rpm*, *kpackage*, *dpkg* can facilitate the installation steps.

There is no package available for SuSE 8.1 and a few other distributions, but after unzipping the *konversation-0.12.tar.gz* package in */usr/local/kde/bin*, the standard *configure; make; make install* steps will do the job just fine. This

assumes that the KDE3 and Qt3-Dev packages, and the standard compiler tools, are installed.

To get started, either go to the *Internet / Konversation* entry in the *K* menu or enter *konversation &* in a terminal window of your choice. (If you compiled the program yourself, you will have to supply the correct path.)

The main window (see Figure 1) is not only your ticket to the world of IRC, but also the command center for configuring the program to your individual needs. The entry point, a dialog box called *Server list*, is used to manage the various IRC servers.

Unfortunately, this is where we stumbled over one of only a few shortcomings of the chat program. Unlike similar IRC programs, the Konversation developers did not supply a list of the most popular **IRC-Networks** and the data for their matching servers.

Select the only available entry, and then click on *Connect*, to contact the KDE IRC server on the largest IRC server network, *IRCNet*, and enter the KDE channel by clicking *#kde-users*. After opening the chat window that appears, you can select *Settings/Konversation Configure* to return to the configuration dialog.

In order to connect to chat servers on other *IRC networks*, click on the *New Server* entry



(Figure 1) and type the details for that server in the window shown in Figure 2 (Freenode [2]). At the same time, you can also choose a channel to immediately connect to the new server. This little gimmick can save you a lot of time later. If you want to connect to a specific server each time you start the program, then use the check box next to the desired server in the *Server List*.

The *Identity* entry in the selection list on the left of Figure 1 is also important. While pseudonyms are frowned on in newsgroups, here they are preferred and encouraged. So pick an appropriate *Nick* and enter it in the nickname field (see Figure 3). Because there are many users, your chosen nick may already have been taken. Konversation supplies three more

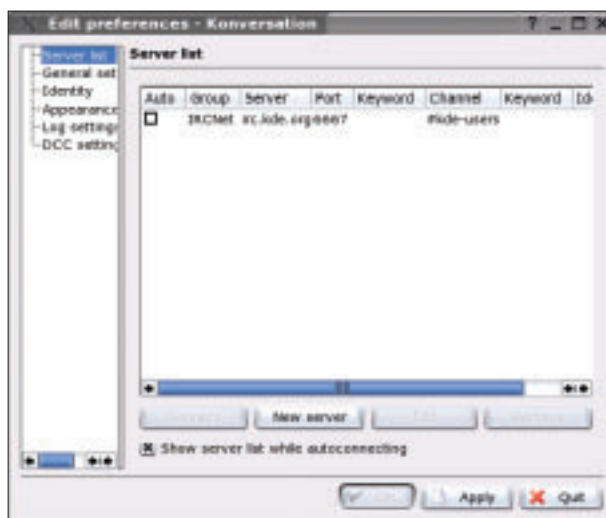


Figure 1: Your window to the world of IRC

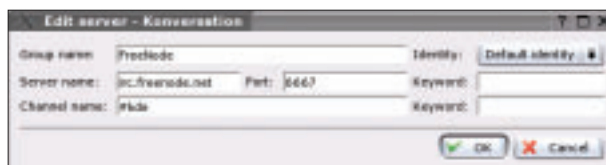


Figure 2: New servers, please!

KTools

In this column we present tools, month by month, which have proven to be especially useful when working under KDE, solve a problem which otherwise is deliberately ignored, or are just some of the nicer things in life, which – once discovered – you would not want to do without.

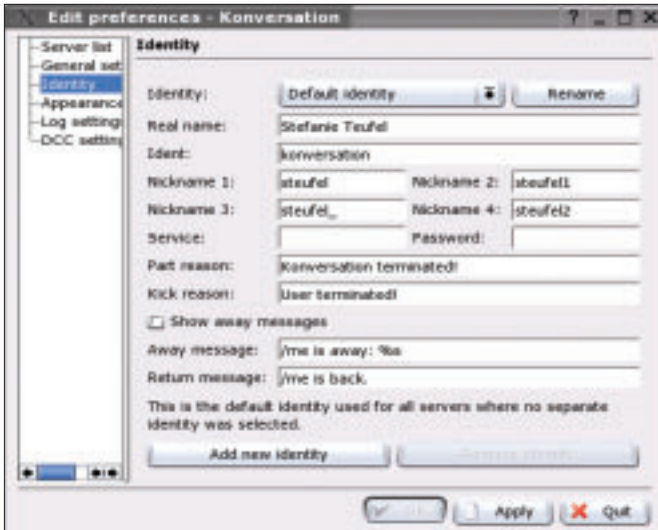


Figure 3: A suitable identity for everybody

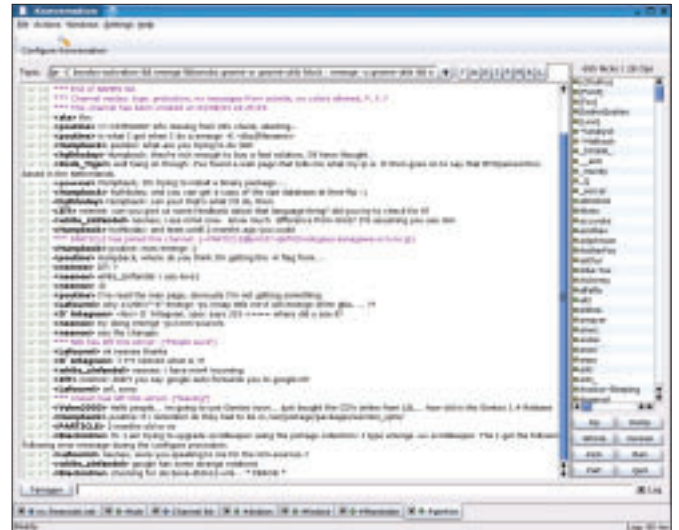


Figure 4: Chat, or just listen first?

nickname fields where you can enter alternative nicknames. The program works its way through the list, if your first choice has already been taken.

Konversation also has the capability to be in one IRC network with a certain nick, while using a different nick in another network. The button *Add new identity* allows you to put on a new “costume”. While the standard name *New Identity* is not very specific, you can change it with the *Rename* button. As soon as you have saved your new “nick”, it will become available in the *Identity* pull down menu. It is also available in the *Server Lists*, after you have made the proper entries using the *Edit* button. This allows you to customize a separate identity for each server.

The behavior of your IRC client can be changed with *General settings*. If you enable the *Automatically Connect* and *Automatically Enter* options, Konversation will try to automatically re-connect if the connection should be broken. A check on *blinking tabs* tells Konversation to light up a small indicator on the chan-

nel tab whenever something happens in the channel. This could be someone writing a message or a user entering or leaving the channel.

Besides chatting, IRC can be used to exchange of data files. *DCCs*, “Direct Client Connections” are used for this purpose. Two IRC clients, you and your partner, set up a direct connection to one another without having to go through the IRC server. You can use the *DCC settings* to configure the connection’s behavior.

The option *DCC accept downloads automatically* should be used with caution, as it will allow Konversation to download anything offered to you without asking any questions. This could also include malicious program code. If you want the program to add the name of the sender to the downloads, simply check the *Sender in data name* checkbox.

On Your Marks, Get Set, Chat!

Once in the channel of your choice, there is nothing to stop you from having exciting conversations. The channel window is divided into three areas (see Figure 4). The messages from your channel partners or the server are shown in the main window. On the right, Konversation lists the users currently in the channel.

Your own messages are typed into the command line at the bottom. If you have kept the default settings for *General settings/command char*, each of your system commands will begin with a slash /. Entering */help* will display the available commands. A quick start can be found at IRChelp [3].

This page makes extensive use of the IRC term *Op*. It has the following meaning: a user who enters a newly created channel is assigned more rights than users who come in later. As the channel *Operator*, you can *kick* another user out of the channel for misbehaving, or for reasons of your own.

The most important commands for Ops are found below the user list on the right. You can click on *kick* to “kick” a user out, and *Ban* outlaws a user from your channel. *Op* allows you to assign other users Op rights - *DeOp* will revoke them. If you want to apply a command to more than one user, use [Ctrl] left mouse button to select those users before applying the command.

Users who spend more time in IRC are bound to make friends. Konversation helps you maintain these contacts, by monitoring when your IRC buddies are online. Drop down the *Window/Notify list* menu, and enter the appropriate nicks using the *New* button. Konversation will then notify you when these users are in a channel or enter a channel.

As much as you may be happy to see some users, others can be a problem. But never fear, the program provides the *Window/Ignore list* menu entry to solve this problem.

GLOSSARY

Core: All KDE programs that are officially released are assigned to so called “Core” packages. While “kdelibs” and “kdebase” must be installed, other packages, that are organized by subject matter such as “kdeadmin” or “kdemultimedia”, can be left out.

IRC-Network: You can reach all the users on all the servers of a specific IRC network. But users on different networks are unable to connect to one another.

INFO

[1] Konversation: <http://konversation.sourceforge.net/>

[2] Freenode: <http://www.freenode.net>

[3] IRC help: <http://www.irchelp.org>