

UnrealIRCd survey results

A while ago we launched a survey about UnrealIRCd and invited people who run UnrealIRCd to do this questionnaire. Ultimately, 342 people have completed the survey. **Thanks a lot for everyone's input, it is really appreciated!** In this paper I summarize the results in 6 pages.

General notes

- Not all percentages may add up to 100%. This can be due to fractions (in which case it will be less) or due to multiple choices (in which case it may be more than 100%)
- Percentages are always the % of the people who answered this question, we never use the percentage-of-percentage
- I make heavy use of **bold text**, some may find this highly annoying, but on the other hand it allows you to skim/read really quick to see any interesting results

Profile

81% of the respondents have 5 years or more experience with IRC and 50% has been an IRCOp for 10 years or more.

Networks, servers, and services

52% has a network of 10-100 users, and 27% of 100-1000 users. Only few respondents run UnrealIRCd on a >1000 user network (5%) or a small 1-10 user network (13%).

We can see here that UnrealIRCd's user base mainly consist of small and medium networks, as **92% of the respondents run a network with less than 1000 users** on average. Of course this is also due to the fact that there are many more smaller networks in general than 1000+ user networks, regardless of what IRC daemon they run.

As for the amount of servers (excluding services), the figures are: **28% has 1 server**, 42% has 2 or 3 servers, and **30% has 4 or more servers**. As you can see, there's quite an equal spread here.

96% of the respondents run services and the top choice is quite clear: **72% uses anope**, 14% uses atheme, 5% uses ircservices, the rest uses something else.

IRCOp activities

There's quite a difference between IRCOps, **41% kills users/bots/drones a few times per week or more**, but **26% only /KILLS a few times per year**. With adding klines/glines it's a similar situation.

More advanced features such as **SPAMFILTER** are used by **33% once per month or more** often, 25% only uses spamfilter a few times per year, and the rest (**41%**) **has never used spamfilter or maybe once**.

Around 75% of the IRCOp's have experience with server linking commands, 25% does not, but then again that may not be that unusual when 28% has just one server.

On to **SAJOIN/SAPART**: **50%** uses these features **once a month or more often**, 26% uses it a few times a year, and the rest (23%) has never used it or only once. For SAMODE the figures are similar (43%, 28% and 29% respectively).

Editing the configuration: most people (**47%**) do this only **a few times per year**. Some do it more often (**38%**), like a **few times per month or week**.

Operating systems: **94%** of our users has installed UnrealIRCd on ***NIX** at some point, this figure is **52%** for **Windows (32% only once)**. Most people (48%) install UnrealIRCd a few times per year, or even more often (16%).

As for what people are **currently running UnrealIRCd on**, we received the following answers (these won't add up to 100% as users may select multiple): **96% Linux, 22% *BSD, 22% Windows, 3% OS X**.

It seems that far more *NIX UnrealIRCd users responded to this survey than Windows UnrealIRCd users. For reference, our UnrealIRCd download counts are roughly 50% *NIX and 50% Windows. Not everyone succeeds with configuring and booting UnrealIRCd, though, so we don't know if the real-life deployment of UnrealIRCd servers is also 50%/50% *NIX/Windows. Thus, **Windows users may be substantially underweight in this survey**, only a little, or not at all, we don't know...

Ratings

We asked how people would rate UnrealIRCd (overall) on a **scale of 1 to 10**, where 1 means extremely bad, and 10 means best.

86% gave UnrealIRCd a 7 or higher (49% even gave UnrealIRCd a 9 or 10). Only 4% gave UnrealIRCd a 4 or lower.

83% gave UnrealIRCd a **7 or higher on featureset** (number of features), 48% gave an 9 or 10. Similarly, **75%** gave a **7 or higher for customizability**.

Of the things we asked to rate, the rating for **'stableness'** was best: **52% gave UnrealIRCd a 10 out of 10, 82% gave us an 8 or higher**.

When we asked **'how current'** UnrealIRCd was or if we were missing various new features, **43% gave us an 9 or 10 out of 10**, 29% gave a seven or eight, 6% gave us a 6, and the remaining 13% gave a 5 or less.

When asked about **why** people chose UnrealIRCd we offered a number of choices.

53% chose UnrealIRCd because they saw it in use on a network they were on. **46%** chose it **because of the number of features** UnrealIRCd offers. 37% chose UnrealIRCd simply because it was the most widely deployed IRC server. **39%** chose us because of the **high customizability**. 28% had UnrealIRCd recommended by a friend. Less chosen answers were: was looking for a free Windows IRCd (14%) and first search result I found (11%).

We also had an option called 'Other' where users could type something in. The people who wrote something here appreciated the featureset and the ease of the configuration most.

Of the respondents, **86% has looked at (21%) or installed (65%) another IRCd**, the majority of our respondents (55%) even has experience with multiple other 'brands'. That's more than I expected. Only 13% has never looked at nor used anything other than UnrealIRCd.

When we asked the people who looked at or installed another IRCd brand (86%) **how** they would **compare UnrealIRCd to other IRCd's**. **53% answered 'Better' or 'Much better'**. 21% answered 'About the same'. 8% answered 'Worse' and 1% answered 'Much worse'. We also had an option **'Hard to say, other IRCd's have different uses'**, which **17%** of the people ticked.

We provided a comment field where users could type text, 31% was kind enough to provide some extra information.

Some things users just couldn't agree on, for example 'bloated with features' versus 'could use a lot more features', people in favor to inspiircd and other people asking us to never go that route.

We also got a few good suggestions as to what areas to improve and what features to add.

Independent from UnreallRCd we asked a general open question: **What do you think about the future of IRC in general?**

49% of the people responded and a **lot of people see the usage of IRC decline**, though not everyone. Some believe that only a certain group of users will remain using it.

In the end, we can conclude that a lot of people are sad to see the usage of IRC decline but **most don't have a good answer as to what can be done** about it. When people do give suggestions, the most seen answer is that IRC is **too difficult for new users**, especially compared to things like twitter and facebook, also **webchat** should be offered more to make IRC as easy as possible for the user.

A number of people point out the **lack of development in the underlying protocol** as a possible cause, and/or the **lack of standards**.

A few people (interestingly) respond that because IRC is spread among so many networks and servers, it **doesn't really get any attention in the media**, especially **compared to apps** or websites such as **facebook, twitter, and skype**.

Featureset

We asked people how they feel about certain features that are currently in UnreallRCd.

Halfop (+h): 47% said 'Required feature', 30% said 'I like it, but can live without it'. 1% asked us to remove this feature.

Channel admin (+a) and channel owner (+q): 60%/66% said 'Required feature', 23%/19% can live without it. 3% asks us to remove this feature, another 3% asks us to make it possible to disable this.

Many people (**59%**) find **Extended Bans** a **required feature**, 19% like it but can live without it. Only 1% wants to remove or disable this. I think we can say this feature is relatively popular.

Opinions on **+G** are more divided: **51% likes** this (33% even chose 'Required feature'), while **39% doesn't use it** at all and rarely sees it being used. 5% asks for a disable option for this, and 4% thinks we should remove this feature.

We were also looking forward to what people had to say with regards to **Channel Mode +f**, another key UnreallRCd feature. **78% likes this feature**, **62%** even **said** it is **required** in an IRCd.

Most people agreed that hostname **cloaking (+x)** is a **mandatory** feature (**77%**). The opinions on **SSL** are similar (84% says **'Required'**).

We were also wondering what people would answer with regards to less used features. Only 23% found KNOCK a required feature, 3% of the users asks for an option to disable this or remove it.

51% likes DCCDENY (34% says required feature). Interestingly, 8% is unaware of what it does precisely.

60% likes HELPOP, 4% asks us for an option to disable it or to remove it.

Featureset – IRC Operators

Similar to previous, we asked how IRCOps feel about certain features.

We also added some (for us) obvious questions. Such as if KILL would be a required feature. 7% found this was not a required feature, we found this interesting. The situation is similar for KLINE/ZLINE/GLINE (5%). Anyway, on to the real results...

64% found **spamfilter** a **required** feature

63% finds **SAJOIN/SAPART** a **required** feature, 18% likes it but can live without it. 3% feels we should remove this entirely.

SAMODE is similar with 59% and 18% respectively. Again 2% feels we should remove this. **CHGHOST: 47% says required feature**, 23% likes it but can live without it.

HTM.. this was actually more of a control question. Currently HTM is almost never used, and is hardly ever triggered automatically. In fact in current development version it is even ripped out. 18% answered 'Required feature' to this one. 31% (understandably) answered 'I'm not sure what it does'.

WebTV support. This is a really old feature in UnreallRCd and very specific to one chat client. In current development version it has been completely removed from UnreallRCd. Fortunately our users seem to agree: **9%** said this was a **required feature**. 12% asks us to disable it or remove it entirely. And 25% wonders what this feature actually does.

Module support: 67% says **Required feature**, 16% likes it but doesn't require it. Interestingly, 4% doesn't know what it is.

Featureset – continued...

We asked about a few features more in-depth:

The first question was:

'From time to time a discussion pops up about the powerful features of UnreallRCd with regards to channel and user management. The discussion usually focuses on features such as 'channel override', the ability for an **IRCOp** to invite himself to a channel and **bypass all modes**, an IRCOp being able to set modes on himself and or use SAMODE, the power to join or part someone to a channel by use of SAJOIN/SAPART, etc.'

A great majority (**79%**) answered '**These features are fine** when used with some consideration'. **18%** said they were **not in favor** of this and want to see better **options to disable this** functionality. Only **4%** thinks these **features should be entirely removed** out of UnreallRCd.

The second question was about **remote includes**, the ability to use URL's in your configuration file so you can (for example) fetch your oper blocks from a remote URL and keep all the O:lines on servers on your network in-synch.

35% uses this feature, which was interesting as we didn't know the use of this feature was so widespread.

19% chose 'I wasn't aware of this feature. Now I hear about it, I might use it on my network', which seems to indicate that we did/do not communicate this clearly enough to our users.

37% said they didn't use or need this feature.

Interestingly, 8% asked us to remove this feature out of UnreallRCd. Sorry to them: we have no plans to do that. We think it's a great feature, and if you don't want it you can disable it at compile-time.

We asked on opinions regarding the **Spamfilter**, one other key (and relatively unique) feature of UnreallRCd.

64% uses this feature and finds it a very useful too.

29% said it was **rather complex**, and a **similar percentage asked to (also) provide more simpler matching** like *bla* and h?llo, in addition to regex.

10% asked us to find a way to prevent mass-kills of innocent users, and a relatively high percentage (**8%**) of users **has often trouble removing existing spamfilters**.

Users could also write text. They often were very positive about this feature. Some people simply never used this feature so didn't know what to write (sorry, we missed that as an option indeed..).

We asked people about what they find of **Channel Mode +f**. 41% responded to this open question.

People were **very positive** about this feature, especially how powerful/configurable it is, they also noted that their **channel owners** were **very happy with it**.

Critics point to the **complex** nature of this channel mode and the need to fine tune it. We also got a number of suggestions to improve it.

We only had 2 clearly negative comments out of 140 regarding this feature.

Another open question we asked was: are there **any major features that UnreallRCd is currently missing?** If so, which? We got a 38% response on this.

Suggestions were very broad on **all kinds of things** which we will look into. Trying to aggregate the responses is hard, but a number of people point towards **features that are currently in 3rd party modules** which they think should be offered by core UnreallRCd. For example, **build-in DNS blacklist support** is clearly missing.

Other than features, we also asked if any other things should definitely be changed in UnreallRCd. 29% responded to this.

Here we got a few feature suggestions as well which we will look into. Other than that: **being able to disable various functionality** and **more fine grained control over IRCOp permissions** was answered a couple of times, these are indeed the areas that we will be focusing on for our 3.4 release.

Modules

One of the ways to improve the configurability of features is by **moving more features to self-contained modules**. This way you can choose which features you want to load, and which you want to leave out. We did point out, though, that doing this is a lot of work for us, so we asked our users if this would be worth the effort:

26% answered they would just load all features so they don't really care whether they are split in self-contained modules or not.

33% chose 'Sounds good, but I wonder if anyone will actually use this? You should spend your precious time on something else'

Finally, 41% chose 'Great idea, I'd like to disable some channel or user modes myself'.

Thus, it seems that a **significant portion of our userbase (41%) is interested in this** and that would justify our effort. The percentage is even higher than we would have estimated.

Continuing with modules: **53% of the respondents use 3rd party modules, 19% even create/run their own modules.**

We at UnreallRCd feel the whole process with regards to modules is currently too complicated or at least too much work, so we asked about this: 'Do you have any problems with the way 3rd party modules currently can be used?'

38% answered '**Too few modules are available**'

4% found it too much effort to install on Windows

8% found it too much effort to install modules on *NIX

24% ticked '**annoying extra work if I upgrade or recompile my core UnreallRCd**'

We agree with that last one, and are looking into ways to improve this.

People could also write something on this, providing suggestions.

The reactions range from the danger of 3rd party modules with regards to stability (a fault in a 3rd party module can take down a server), to suggestions of **automatic or easy compilation of downloaded modules**, or even simply **including as much 3rd party modules as possible**.

Several people also point out that we currently **lack any documentation on the module API**. This is a good point and should be addressed. (Long ago there was written documentation, actually, but unfortunately this was hosted off-site and lost in a harddisk crash)

Documentation & Support

One of the areas UnreallRCd is often praised for is its documentation. We were therefore eager to hear what users were going to say about this, and if there were perhaps areas where we can still improve.

75% is happy with the unreal32docs HTML documentation, 39% even calls it 'excellent', that's good to hear.

56% is happy with the FAQ. 23% has not used it (no answer), 19% finds the FAQ only 'reasonable'. Seems there's **room for improvement** there.

71% is happy with the example unrealircd.conf (32% says excellent). 17% only finds it 'reasonable'.

Many users (**42%**) **have not used the forums** (forums.unrealircd.com). **Of the users who did use them**, 62% rates it excellent or good. **A significant minority (32%) rates it as 'reasonable'**. Few people rate it as bad or quite bad (5%).

Our IRC support channel (**#unreal-support**) is similar. **49% of our respondents has not used it**. Of the users who did rate it, 64% of those users find it Good to Excellent, **24% finds it reasonable**, and the remaining **~12% finds it quite bad or bad**.

Overall, while the majority is happy with **our forum and IRC support**. There's also a significant amount of users that don't rate it too well, this **requires our attention**.

Fortunately we asked this very question: do you have any tips as to what could be improved with regards to our documentation and/or support?

Suggestions were made to update specific parts of the **documentation**, **linking** remains a difficult subject and we should provide **more examples**. Most people praise the docs as being the best of all IRC servers. While the content is up to date the **layout feels a bit outdated** to some people.

Unfortunately we did not get many suggestions as to how support could be improved.

We asked what could be improved with regards to the example unrealircd.conf, **62% was in favor of the suggestion to have two example confs: one like it's now, and one very short one. People were divided on the rest**.

We missed an 'don't change anything, it's fine the way it is' type of answer for this question (my bad..), but we had an 'Other' option which quite a number of people used to point out they really liked the current example conf with the inline documentation.

Finally

We asked how we could **get the community more involved** with UnreallRCd (development).

A tough question, we know, only 21% answered this one.

Better module API and **source code documentation** was suggested a few times (again).

Several people pointed out that they would love to help with development but they don't know 'C'.

Using things like **twitter**, a **facebook** page, etc.

A few people suggested a way for server admins to share their thoughts on administrating networks.

Almost everyone was **very positive about the survey**. Some pointed to one or two questions which were missing an option.

As for suggestions for UnreallRCd or the project as a whole, people encouraged us to **keep the good work going**. **More frequent releases** was also called for, some suggesting a concurrent stable and development line so users can choose between latest stable or less stable but newer development versions.. we plan to do this with 3.2 & 3.4.