A Maemo Client for the VKontakte Social Network Service

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Abstract

Social networks and their services cover a large part of today's Internet world. VKontakte is one of the most popular social network in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. At the same time, mobile access to such services is important for end-users, when the current location is changed frequently. The project MySocials develops a maemo client for the VKontakte social network service. The client allows editing user profile data, managing contacts (friend lists), and sending messages. In this progress report, we describe the MySocials current state. The project is oriented to the Maemo platform and such mobile devices like Nokia Internet tablets. Its current iteration (phase) started after the 6th FRUCT seminar in Autumn 2009; the target is publishing the MySocials release for Maemo 5 running on Nokia N900.

Social networks and their services cover a large part of today's Internet world. VKontakte [1] is a typical example of a social network, which is very popular in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The network has more than 57 million users (14.01.2010). The analog of VKontakte is Facebook [2].

The MySocials project develops a Maemo client for VKontakte users. MySocials is primarily oriented to such mobile devices like Nokia Internet tablets, e.g., N810 or N900. The basic functionality is to view profile data of her/his friends, edit user's own profile data and send/receive messages.

The project was initiated in 2009 at the Petrozavodsk State University (PetrSU), PetrSU-Nokia-NSN laboratory of wireless and mobile technologies [3]. MySocials belongs to the family of FRUCT research projects [4].

The MySocials project started in February 2009 as a student software engineering project at the Department of Computer Science, PetrSU. The idea was initiated from the FRUCT Program [7], thanks to Sergey Balandin.

The first iteration run till May 2009. The project leader was Alexandr Borodin, a senior lecturer at CS Dept. of PetrSU. On this phase, the project elaborated the idea of a mobile social network client for the Maemo platform. As a result, the basic concept of MySocials appeared; it was presented at the 5th FRUCT seminar and the AMICT'2009 workshop [5].

The second iteration started in July 2009 as lab study in the PetrSU IT park and continues till October 2009. A demo prototype for Maemo 4.1 Diablo was produced; it is written in C and runnable at N8x0 tablets. The demo was presented at the 6th FRUCT seminar [6].

The third iteration is from November 2009 till May 2010, leaded by Kirill Kulakov, an senior lecturer from CS Dept. of PetrSU. The primary target is to develop a stable version of MySocials for Maemo 5 and the corresponding device N900. New interface based on Hildon 2.2 library was prodused. Network driver work stability was improved

The MySocials architecture is based on network drivers for social network services. Each driver implements data exchange with a certain service. The internal coordination follows our original XML-RPC-based protocol. The GTK+ widget toolkit is used for creating user interface. GUI objects are implemented via data node types and data structure from XML descriptions. Local data base is implemented with RDF/OWL technology. We developed the SONET dictionary for storing user profiles locally; SONET is extension of the FOAF dictionary.

Current release is published at the Maemo extras-devel repository as an application. The driver for VKontakte is a separate package (libvkontakte library); it can be used by other applications. Source code is published as an open source at Gitorious [8].

Recently, MySocials is on the testing phase. For careful network driver testing we implemented a simple terminal client. The project Bugzilla [9] contains 38 bugs in total, 23 fixed (05.03.2010). Some bugs were received from the open maemo community.

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