**Team 17 Project Proposal**

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**Need:**

As government spying and censorship becomes more common and/or well known it becomes harder to communicate without fear of prying eyes. This creates a need for a communication network in which its user can feel confident that their identities will remain unknown and that they are able to speak freely without fear of prosecution. This could be especially useful in protecting one’s conversations from eavesdroppers. It could even be used in organizing protests against corrupt powers.

**Approach:**

In order to meet this need we plan to create an anonymous communication network that is based upon the popular IRC protocol. We will define the word anonymous as a system in which each user does not know where a sent message originated. We will use an open IRC library, but only plan to implement the protocol’s most important functions. We first plan creating a distributed communication platform. This platform will allow several end hosts to communicate with each other without knowing where the complete message has originated from. To do this we plan to break messages into multiple parts based on how long the message is, encrypt the messages, and then distribute the message amongst peers. The current style of encryption we plan is up in air, but we are currently looking into a public-private key method. Since people can be identified in this method, we will need to research ways to circumvent this. We are also researching onion routing as a method of distribution.

The second phase will be to create a local IRC proxy that the user will run on their computer. This will be built on top of the communication platform, and will act as a local IRC server. This local server will forward the messages to all other clients connected. This will allow users to use this anonymous platform without modification to their current IRC clients.

**Benefit:**

The benefit of our implementation will be the fact that it uses a distributed network rather than connecting to a centralized server. This will make it harder to determine the original source of the messages. There will also be no central logs of all communications. A client will still be able to log conversation.

**Competition:**

The idea of an anonymous communication network is not new, however our Anonychat will still bring together a combination of things that does not currently exist on other products. Some anonymous communications include the Invisible Internet Project (I2P), an ongoing effort to build a free, open source, and anonymous internet. I2P includes a system to allow anonymous IRC communication, by simply allowing standard IRC protocol over the I2P network. Since I2P is designed at the network layer, it does restrict compatibility to only those on the I2P network to maintain anonymity, whereas Anonychat’s restrictions are to the application itself. Users will be able connect across any existing communication network. Freenode is an example of IRC using the standard protocol with SSL encryption to ensure anonymity. Freenode, being an IRC protocol, still will have direct connections that can indicate relations between users, while our Anonychat will implement a method to obfuscate intended targets of messages. In addition, Anonychat aims to be more directly peer to peer, requiring a central server only for initial connections to the Anonychat network. Competiton also extends to peer to peer style communication network Skype, which uses a similar connection system we intend to implement (a central server to start, then p2p communication afterwards). A key difference between Skype and Anonychat is that Skype’s main focus is not anonymity, and uses P2P connections in a more direct method. Some projects in the IRC field, such as Quassel and Rust, are more direct competition in anonymity, but do not use the P2P connectivity we will attempt. Overall, our metric for success will be if Anonychat is able to reliably send messages through the distributed system with minimal chance for the messages to directly connect users.