Set Up The Mutt Client

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1 Why Use Mutt

More and more GUI MUA available today such as web client, MS Outlook, Thunderbird and so on, why do you choose to use the console-base and old mail client, mutt? The answer is quite simple:

> All mail clients suck. This one just sucks less.[1]

I am Linux fan and crazy about the efficiency of using Linux and the tools that the Linux hackers use. Mutt is one of them, and it is suitable for those who has to handle bundles of emails every day. I am not a chief leader nor a manager, but rather a newbie to the computer science world subscribing several mailing list, thus it is one of the daily work to read the nearly 50 pieces of emails a day post by others and myself for a typical discussion. A good and easy to customize MUA is assert to me. Here, Mutt is the one.

2 Fire Up Mutt

This section explains the instructions to install the **mutt** into your own operating system, and provides some configuration tips here. As far as I am using Debain like distribution, the following command has to be changed if you are using other kinds of distribution.

2.1 My Mutt Suite

Some would point out that mutt itself could really technically do most of things including sending mails and retrieving mails from the server. This absolutely works, but I like to have a division of labor of sort, splitting the fetching, sorting, sending, and reading between different programs. After all, it is the *Unix Philosophy*.

> Write programs that do one thing and do ti well. Write programs
> to work together.[2]

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[1]me, circa 1995

[2]Doug Mcllroy

I have work with gmail for several years and now switch to mutt. So the example here is to shows how to set up gmail in mutt. It is similar to set up other email account by only make little modification.

The mutt suite I use includes:

- offlineimap

- imapfilter

- mutt

- msmtp

- archievemail

- vim

- goobook

The following subsections will detail explains each part of the tools and the how to make the configuration along with them.

2.2 Synchronizing mail with offlineimap

There are two ways to fetch the emails from the remote mail server by using the POP and IMAP protocols.

POP protocol is suitable for conventional email server. With this protocol, you will download all the mails from the remote mail server by indicating whether to delete the email you download from the server or not. If you don't delete them, the Inbox in the remote mail server will populated with hundreds of mails. But I you delete them, and you delete the local mails accidentally, referring to the old mails will be nearly impossible. What's more, It is note suitable for todays more advanced emails features, such labeling and subdirectories.

IMAP is born to deal with such difficulties. It can directly connect to the remote mail server and performs the manipulations there, such as move an email from one folder to another, which is similar to label the email. What's more, you don't have to download all the mails from the server as you can and have to view the emails online. This can save lots of space on disk, however, it decrease the efficiency as it depends on the speeds of your network. On the other hand, you can not read your old mails if you are offline.

Here come the offline IMAP. Offline Imap uses the IMAP protocol to synchronize a local copy of all your emails messages for multiple accounts in a maildir format. Having your email be local means that reading is fast, since the emails have already download to your machine. Any changes you make, such as deleting, changing flags (important, read, unread, starred, . . .), or moving the email to a different folder are performed on the local copy, which is periodically synchronized with the remote copy. That is what I need to fetch the gmail.

2.3 Sorting mail with imapfilter

If you are experienced gmail user, you must be familiar with the filtering ability of the gmail. You can specify different kinds of criteria for specific mails to be performed with specific operation. For example, you can move the email from mutt-users@mutt.org to a specific folder and mark as starred, or you can delete the mail containing violence key words and so on.

Gmail has a powerful ability to make it. So, if you are using gmail, you can either set the filter on the gmail remote server side, or make the configuration locally. But If you have mail accounts that the remote server side doesn't provide this function, you have to do it yourself.

2.4 Reading mail with mutt

Supposing that you have synchronized your mails from the server and performed the necessary filtering, it's time to set up mutt and to read it. Configure your mutt client is an art as configuring vim. There are one hundred .muttrc if there are one hundred users there. The details of the configuration will shown later and I just what kinds of thing should be configured here.

- *account information.* The account information including the name of the user and password of the user should be given.

- *color.* Color is one of the attractive reason why someone switch to mutt. The quotations, header, footer, signature, and so on can have their own color defined by yourself.

- *encryption.* You'd better not to store your password in plain text, encryption here is necessary.

- *mailing list.* You can what your mailing lists are and some of which are subscribed.

- *address book.* The address book could store the contacts for you.

2.5 Sending mail with msmtp

Msmtp is a very simple SMTP client. It contacts the SMTP with your account credentials when you send mail and then passes the sent email to the server.

2.6 Saving old emails with archivemail

If you have thousands of mails, you'd better archive them for better storing and organization. This is quite flexible since you can specify the different criteria to select the mails.

2.7 Synchronize your contacts with goobook

If you are using gmail, I am sure the gmail contacts mean a lot to you. It is necessary to synchronize the gmail contacts with the mutt address book.

3 Detail Configurations

Now presents the detail configurations step by step.

3.1 Preparation

In Debain-like Operating system, some package should be installed for further use.

```
sudo apt-get install mutt -y
sudo apt-get install urlview -y
sudo apt-get install muttprint -y
sudo apt-get install offlineimap -y
sudo apt-get install imapfilter -y
sudo apt-get install msmtp-mta -y
sudo apt-get install archivemail -y
```

Listing 1: Install necessary packages

With all the necessary required packages installed, we next turn to fire up the folder and files.

It is easier to keep everything together under one directory for git to keep track of and for scripts for installation and configuration. Different programs have their own configuration file with specific name and in specific location, however, we can accommodate to it by make some symbolic files.

```
# every configuration is populated in ~/.
    mail_configs
mkdir ~/.mail_configs

# main folder for mutt configuration
mkdir ~/.mail_configs/mutt

# different filtering criteria stored here.
mkdir ~/.mail_configs/imapfilter

# make this directory readable to you only
chmod -R 700 ~/.mail_configs

# make another set of folders to hold the local
# copy for offlineimap
mkdir ~/.mail # containing all accounts
```

```
# each account in a separate folder
mkdir ~/.mail/gmail
chmod -R 700 ~/.mail

# make symblinks for default mutt directory
ln -s ~/.mail_configs/mutt ~/.mutt
```

Listing 2: Building folder hierarchy

3.2   Configurate offlineimap

A fully annotated configuration file is available if you want to see all the bells and whistles available.

The default offlineimap configuration file is named /.offlineimap. As mentioned above, all the configuration files are stored in a single directories and the other necessary files are created by ln command. So, now we save the offlineimap configuration file offlineimaprc in /.mail_configs/offlineimaprc and make a symbolic link named /.offlineimaprc to it.

```
# create the symbolic link for offlineimap configs
ln -s ~/.mail_configs/offlineimaprc ~/.offlineimaprc
```

Listing 3: configuring offlineimap

When you have configurated your own offlineimaprc, then you can test it from the terminal to make sure that it's working at this point. If you are trying to connect to Gmail, be sure you have **enable IMAP** in the Gmail interface.

```
# test the offlineimap configuration
offline -c ~/.offlineimaprc
```

Listing 4: configuring offlineimap

3.3   Configurate imapfilter

Imapfilter is another program which is able to sort and move messages around on the IMAP server. I use it before calling offlineimap to sort my mail into the correct folder (ie, messages for a certain class into a given folder). The configuration file can use regular expressions to do the sorting, and is extendable using Lua, if you want to do so. Sorting can take place based on who an email is sent from, sent to, title contents, body contents, other header information, email size, age of the email, email status (recent, unread,) and many other possibilities in combination.