Raspberry Pi Setup

Hardware Setup

A Raspberry Pi 2 Model B along with the official Raspberry Pi Camera Module and Raspberry Pi 2 Model B Case were purchased to serve as the basis of the portable portion of the project that would reside at the site that required technical support. With the Camera Module being more than capable of capturing high resolution and high frame rate video, the option of powering the Raspberry Pi 2 Model B via mini-USB, the low power requirements of the Raspberry Pi as shown by the article referenced above in the literature search, as well as the relatively cheap cost, it seemed the perfect device to build the system upon, even if only for a proof-of-concept if not for a fully realised solution.

Along with this device the following parts were acquired to serve all the required functions:-

* An EasyAcc Ultra 16000mAh power pack was procured to serve as a portable power source
* A Microsoft Lifechat LX-3000 was borrowed from WVN to provide audio support for the voice chat portion of the project, a Dynamode Nano USB WL-700N-RXS Wifi Adapter was bought to allow the Raspberry Pi to connect to Wireless Networks
* A Kingston 16GB Micro SD Card was purchased to act as the Hard Drive of the Raspberry Pi

Software Setup

The first step to set up the Raspberry Pi was to select and install an Operating System (OS). An OS called Raspbian (based on the Debian Wheezy Linux distribution) was chosen due to its status as the officially supported OS for Raspberry Pi, and its widely adopted use by Raspberry Pi users. Once the image file for this OS was downloaded, it was written to the SD Card using a tool called Win32DiskImager. Once written, the SD Card simply needed to be inserted into the Raspberry Pi and it could be powered and used.

While a Raspberry Pi is simple to configure for operation via SSH, first-time set up of the Raspberry Pi requires a screen and keyboard to provide the interface to configure SSH, wireless connections, and a handful of other settings. A small portable screen and keyboard were provided by the developer for the duration of the development process to serve this purpose, though these accessories are not required for use in the finished product.

Once powered, the Raspiconfig utility was loaded and settings to enable the Camera Module, to enable SSH, to expand the size of the partition accessible to Raspbian, and to enable WiFi were set using the utility. Once these settings were enabled, the Raspberry Pi was rebooted and connected to a Router (again supplied by the developer) via Ethernet cable to allow for access via SSH. Once powered up again, an attempt was made to configure WiFi settings, which is performed by editing the WPA\_Supplicant.conf file located in /etc/WPA\_Supplicant. The following snippet was appended to the file and saved:-

network={  
ssid="NETWORKNAME"  
psk="PASSWORD"  
}

Adding this snippet should have allowed the Raspberry Pi to connect to the router wirelessly, but this didn’t work. After a brief investigation it was found that the Nano USB WiFi Adapter was faulty, and would quickly overheat and malfunction. After a cursory search, it was found this was a common problem with this adapter. To remedy this, an Edimax EW-7811UN Wireless Nano USB Adapter was purchased as a replacement, chosen largely due to its purported reliability and widely adopted use in other Raspberry Pi projects.

Once the new WiFi adapter was installed, the Raspberry Pi quickly connected to the router, and SSH was possible over the Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN) provided by the router. SSH control was established using Putty, a common tool used for this purpose. A similarly common tool called WinSCP was used to transfer files to and from the Raspberry Pi.

Raspberry Pi Implementation

The first part of the device portion of this project tackled was providing a live video feed over the internet. It was decided due to time constraints that it would be far better to find and use existing software to provide this functionality rather than to design and build programs that likely already existed. After reading various documents (blogs, articles, and forum posts) regarding other Raspberry Pi projects used for IP Camera, WiFi Camera, and Security Camera purposes (similar to those specified by this project), it was found that the most commonly used package was Motion. Motion provided a basic video feed accessible over the internet, and had a large variety of configuration options, including password protection and motion detection, among other features.

Installing packages to the Raspberry Pi is usually as simple as giving a single command to the Raspberry Pi, in this case: sudo apt-get install motion. Upon receiving this instruction, the APT (Advanced Packaging Tool) provided by Raspbian looks up the package in its stored Debian Sources file found in /etc/apt/sources.list (which is updated using apt-get update), and then calculates all dependencies of the package that weren’t already installed, and downloads and installs the package and all its dependencies. However, this requires an internet connection to work, and it was proving impossible to connect the Raspberry Pi to the internet provided by the university, Eduroam. Unfortunately, the developer lived in university accommodation and had no other access to the internet. Instead, an attempt was made to install Motion and its dependencies manually by finding them in the Raspbian Repository Archive, writing them to the SD card, and de-packaging them on the Raspberry Pi. This did not work, and progress was halted until internet access could be established. A full reinstall of Raspbian was then performed to remove the mismatched software and dependencies and to reset any configuration options that were potentially incorrectly changed in efforts to connect the Raspberry Pi to Eduroam.

Internet access was eventually achieved by registering the Raspberry Pi to another internet service provided by the university, Swis-lite, that is usually reserved for game consoles. Once connected, running the command sudo apt-get install motion correctly installed the program to the Raspberry Pi. It was at this time that it was discovered that since the program was designed to be used as Security Camera software, it deliberately delivered only low frame-rate video to remote viewers. Tests showed that this frame rate was unacceptably low (2-3 FPS) and could not provide higher FPS due to the limitations of the software, since it originally designed to only provide an overview of the area live, and to record video for retrieval later only when motion was detected.

A deeper search of software available for the Raspberry Pi revealed a package called RPi Cam Web Interface. Though it utilised Motion to provide some of its functionality, it was designed not as a Security Camera-like application, but was intended to provide a full HD high frame rate camera feed, as well as a comprehensive interface that allowed the user to change the desired frame rate, capture resolution, brightness and contrast settings, and a host of other configuration options, as well as access to some system tools, including buttons to shut down or reboot the Raspberry Pi (this interface would serve well to allow limited remote operation of the Raspberry Pi without full SSH connection). All of this functionality was provided as a web page viewable in any browser and accessible by the IP address of the Raspberry Pi through port 80. This software seemed like it would well satisfy the video requirements of the project.

As it was not an archived Raspbian package, installation of RPi Cam Web Interface was not as simple as that of Motion, and required the source code to be cloned from GitHub and installed using the following set of commands:-

git clone https://github.com/silvanmelchior/RPi\_Cam\_Web\_Interface.git

cd RPi\_Cam\_Web\_Interface

chmod u+x RPi\_Cam\_Web\_Interface\_Installer.sh

./RPi\_Cam\_Web\_Interface\_Installer.sh install

At this point an installer menu provided access to installing the program itself as well as a pre-configured Apache client to provide the web capabilities.

It was found that the application would automatically record video whenever it detected any motion. This was undesirable as it could quickly and inadvertently fill up all of the available memory space on the SD card. Since there was no option to directly deactivate this, the motion capture settings were tweaked so that motion had to be detected for over 10000 video frames before triggering recording, and ‘motion’ was changed to be defined as a difference of over 10000 (arbitrary units) between frames. This effectively made it impossible for ‘motion’ to be detected and impossible for it to last long enough to trigger recording if it was.

From this point on, RPi Cam Web Interface required no further configuration. It provided a sufficiently high quality video stream that was expandable to see more detail, as well as all the interaction utilities advertised.

Next, a lightweight application called RemotePiManager that was developed alongside the Camera Registrar server was installed to the Raspberry Pi stored in /RemotePiManager. This program would access a file called details.conf stored in the same directory and register itself to the server with the location specified on the first line of details.conf, and receive and store a unique ID. Once registered, the application then pings the Registrar every second to inform it that the Raspberry Pi is online and to allowed the Registrar to register the IP address by which the device could be accessed. Details of how this IP address is used can be found in the Cam Registrar Implementation section on page X.

Once RemotePiManager was tested and was working as intended, focus shifted to the voice chat requirements. Since this function is common to both the remote device and the local client, the implementation of Voice Chat has been given its own section on page XX

## Voice Chat Implementation

During the course of development, and during the research for original specifications document, it was expected that a VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) program would be installed onto the Raspberry Pi and integrated into the client running on the Technician’s computer. Some solutions offered the ability to complete calls using the IP address of each caller, which was ideal. Later on when it came to actually implement voice chat, further inspection was carried out and found that most VOIP solutions required installing several extra applications, such as a softphone application, and an IP PBX, among others, none of which could be properly integrated into the client. Even using Java SIP libraries to create a client that could be integrated properly seemed unnecessarily over complicated, since these libraries were designed to handle the handshaking between devices to determine what media and devices they had in common to communicate with each. This seemed especially so when considering the fact the developer had direct control over both applications and could simply decide in advance exactly how they would communicate. In hindsight, it is also likely that while using Java SIP libraries the same problem that was found when pursuing the decided upon course of action would have occurred.

Ultimately it was decided a very simple class could be designed and added to both the client and device that would allow very simple two-way audio communication by recording small frames of audio and sending them using UDP packets and then playing them back on the receiving end. Each caller would run two threads, one that would record audio to a Byte Array and send it to the other caller, and another that would receive incoming Byte Arrays and play them back. At its core, the class that managed these calls, called TechCall, relied on Java DataLines. The class would request a DataLine from the system’s audio mixer that suited a specific audio format (in this case, 8KHz, 16-bit, mono-channel, signed, and little-Endian). For recording, a TargetDataLine was required, and a SourceDataLine was required for playing back audio. Both of these objects natively wrote and read Byte Arrays, perfect for use with standard Java UDP socket libraries.

There were two constructors for this class. One of these required no arguments to be passed to it, and would be used by the Raspberry Pi at startup. The other constructor required an IP address passed as a String. When the startCall() method is called it checks to see if an IP address was actually set by the constructor, and if it was, it would initiate the call to a given IP address. If no IP address was set by the constructor the class would wait for an incoming UDP packet before starting the playback and recording threads.

During testing, it was found that a problem arose when setting up the DataLines on the Raspberry Pi. The following snippet of code would throw a LineUnavailableException once it reached the indicated line:-

private AudioFormat format = new AudioFormat(8000, 16, 1, true, false); DataLine.Info targetInfo = new DataLine.Info(TargetDataLine.class, format);

targetLine = (TargetDataLine) AudioSystem.getLine(targetInfo); //error

targetLine.open(format);

The targetLine object is used to record audio, and there are no problems with this when running on Windows machines or when running on the Linux machines available in the Swansea University Linux Lab. This problem is present only on the Raspberry Pi, regardless of whether it is running Oracle JDK or OpenJDK. The problem is believed to be related to the interaction between Java’s AudioSystem libraries and the Raspberry Pi’s hardware, or perhaps with the Alsa audio mixer that managed Raspberry Pi audio in Raspbian.

Considering the popularity of Debian, and of Raspbian one Raspberry Pis, and the fact that the libraries used to implement this TechCall class are included in the standard JDK, the idea that this wouldn’t work was completely unforeseen and unpredicted. Research carried out after the fact reveal that it is a fairly common issue that simply has no solution available to developers, however due to the nature of the problem and the fact that it was completely unforeseen meant that no research into whether a library included in the standard Java libraries would work was carried out.

As stated earlier, using Java SIP libraries to implement VOIP would likely have encountered the same problem when trying to access any microphone connected to the Raspberry Pi.

There are potential solutions to this issue, the most obvious of which would be to re-write the program in a different language (e.g. C# or more likely C++). However, a similar issue may well have been encountered in another language, and since it would require re-writing large portions of the project, it was deemed that this would simply take too long. It would perhaps be possible to only write a small program to record and send audio in a different language, then start it as a separate process from RemotePiManager and pass it the IP address to send the packets to, but this would likely be difficult to manage properly when the call ends and might well require a reboot of the device to restart a dropped or ended call.

Suffice it to say, the Raspberry Pi would not allow recording of microphone input, but it could play back the sound frames it received. This allowed one-way communication from the Technician to the end-user, which would be sufficient for the Technician to relay instructions, but doesn’t really allow the end-user to ask questions or explain anything.

In reality, the process of using this device would usually begin with the end-user calling Tech Support on the phone for help with their problem, and only after exhausted other options would the Technician request that the user activate the camera and put it on. Ultimately, it’s likely that the Technician and end-user could and would maintain the phone call they were having, the exception to this being if the original call had been made on a wired phone. If they are already on the phone with each other, they could simply continue the phone call while the end user just wears the Raspberry Pi without a headset. Failing this, one-way communication is still possible using the Raspberry Pi and computer client, but the end-user would have to communicate with hand gestures, or by writing down more complicated questions and showing them to the camera, a cumbersome process but still a functional one.

Red = references required

Blue = add to abbreviations section