



USER GUIDE

— by Tristano Ajmone, Sept. 2010 —

Welcome to iXu

iXu (Inform Extensions Updater) is a free software for updating Inform7 extensions. It is intended as a tool for those who'd like to have a copy on their drive of all the extensions available at Inform7.com's extensions page:

<http://inform7.com/write/extensions/>

iXu was created using the free software AutoIt Script v3:

<http://www.autoitscript.com/>

iXu is a STAND-ALONE application, so it doesn't need any installation. Just unzip it and create a shortcut to iXu's executable file — it will run from within its folder and therein store all the files it will create.

Beta Warning!

Even though I thoroughly tested iXu (on XP SP3, Italian) it is still in Beta version.

I've worked at it taking advantage of a few hours of free time here and there, mostly during night time, so chances are that errors might have sneaked-in due to lack of sleep... ;-)

This is version Beta 2.3. Since first Beta release, some issue came up related to zipping copies of the extensions in the Extensions Archive folder: most Windows systems, except Windows XP SP3, would crash while attempting to zip. After a thorough investigation of the matter it became clear to me that problem was due to the AutoIt UDF Zip library I was using. Since the upgrade from AutoIt 3.2 to version 3.3 the UDF ceased to be compatible with systems other than XP SP3.

I've therefore decided to remove the zipping process altogether. Now copies of the extensions are kept in the Extensions Archive folder as plain .i7x files, only the file name is changed according to the archive criteria (as explained further on in this Guide).

General Warning

ON FIRST RUN IXU WILL OVERWRITE ALL THE EXTENSIONS CONTAINED IN INFORM 7 EXTENSIONS FOLDER!!!

That is: it will download every extension that is available on Inform7.com's extensions RSS page, and copy it to I7 extensions folder, overwriting them without asking confirmation. This means that any extensions coming from sources other than Inform7.com should not be at risk of being overwritten, still ...

BEFORE LAUNCHING IXU UPDATE MAKE A COPY OF YOUR INFORM 7 EXTENSIONS FOLDER.

If by any chance you have manually changed some third party extensions, and the extension gets overwritten by iXu download, you'd lose your changes.

Using iXu

iXu is very simple to use. The user is presented with an interface with a single button START. Pressing the button will start the extensions update process.

During the update process the button will read WORKING and be disabled.

When the update is finished the button will read VIEW LOG and can be pressed to view the log file (a txt file) containing the details of the extensions downloaded (if any) and the failed downloads (if any).

The interface has a big four-digits display: once iXu has interrogated Inform7.com website, it will display the total number of extension files available from the website.

There are also two greyed-out labels: “Downloads:” and “Errors:”. These labels will turn respectively blue and red in case any downloads are performed or errors encountered, and they will show the total numbers of downloads or download-errors.

In case both labels remain grey after completing the update process, it means there were no extensions to update.

The update process can be run only once, to run it again you need to close and restart iXu.

It's as simple as this!

There are also two menus: “Tools” and “Links”.

The tools menu offers a number of functions related to iXu (opening folders, contacting the author, visiting iXu website, ecc.).

The links menu offers some IF related links.

How iXu Works

The way iXu works is very simple and it takes as a reference for decisions two folders which are located inside the iXu program folder: “Extensions Archive” and “Extensions Download”. These folders will be created at first execution of iXu.

The operative scheme of iXu is as follows:

- It connects to Inform7.com's Extension RSS page and extracts a list of all the available extensions.
- Running through the list it checks for each extension if iXu's “Extensions Archive” folder contains a copy of the extension matching its publication date, if not it downloads it in the “Extensions Download” folder (overwriting previous versions of it, if any), **then copies the extension to Inform 7 extensions folder overwriting any existing version**. Finally, it creates a copy of the extension in the “Extensions Archive” folder (adding at the beginning of the filename the author's name, and at the end of the filename a timestamp with the release date).
- After processing all the extensions in the list, iXu creates an updated Extensions List HTML page containing the description of all downloaded extensions (latest version only, no duplicates) as presented on Inform7.com website.
- A log file is then rendered available to the user through the interface's only button. The log contains a list of the downloaded extensions (if any) and the failed downloads (if any).

iXu therefore bases his decision to download an extension solely on the presence or absence of a copy of the given extension in the “Extensions Archive” folder. This means that if you delete any copies of an extension in that folder you'll force iXu to reload that extension on next execution. The Archive folder doesn't contain any subfolders: the author's name is prefixed to the extension's name, the date of the extension's publication is appended to it. If for any reasons you need an older version of an extension, this is the folder where you should look for it.

It is not clear to me if Inform7.com RSS extensions page lists older versions of an extension or only the latest releases of it, but as extensions do get updated iXu will keep in his local folder copies of the older editions downloaded of any extension. This might come handy in case you'd need an older version of an extension for any reason.

The "Extensions Download" folder only contains the updated version of any extension (unlike the Archive folder which contains all available versions of any extension). Each extension is placed inside a folder with it's author's name, mirroring the system used in Inform 7 actual extensions folder. The purpose of this folder is to keep a copy of all extensions downloaded by iXu. Extensions inside this folder are always the latest release. Deleting extensions inside this folder has no effect on iXu's behaviour, but keep in mind that iXu will not redownload them.

Every extension downloaded will have it's "creation" and "last modified" date set to the date of publication on Inform 7 RSS page.

The log file is deleted and replaced at each execution of iXu, so if for any reason you want to keep a copy of your log files rename them after each execution.

If iXu doesn't find Inform 7 extensions folder (it assumes it will be: MyDocuments/Inform/Extensions) it will just download to its "Extensions Download" folder and you'll have to "install" extensions manually by copying the contents of "Extensions Download" folder to Inform 7 extensions folder.

There isn't much else to say about iXu, except that it's in Beta stage and I need feedback from it's users. So:

PLEASE SEND ME YOUR FEEDBACK!
be it positive or negative,
I need to know on which systems iXu works.

I need suggestions for improvement, comments, correction, ecc. I'll need at least 10 positive feedbacks to release it as final version 1.0.

Last, here are some known issues with iXu Beta 1:

- If you leave open the log file that was opened from within iXu and attempt to re-run iXu it simply won't until you close the log file — iXu will "jam" in the icon-tray and you'll have to close both the log file and iXu (from the icon-tray or the task manager) and re-run iXu. I've found no workaround to this problem at the moment.
- iXu might fail to download extensions containing special characters in their name. Since none such extension exists yet, I haven't faced the problem at present.

I hope that you'll enjoy iXu!

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