



OPEN SOURCE APPLICATIONS FOUNDATION

What's Compelling About Chandler:

A Current Perspective

Chandler is intended to be an open source personal information manager for email, calendars, contacts, tasks, and general information management, as well as a platform for developing information management applications. It is currently under development and will run on Windows, Mac, and Linux-based PC's.

Following are several of the areas in which we think Chandler will be compelling.

General Information Management

With Chandler, users will be able to organize diverse kinds of information for their own convenience -- not the computer's convenience. Chandler will have a rich ability not only to associate and interconnect items, but also to gather and collect related items in a single place creating a context sensitive "view" of many types of data, mixing-and-matching email, mailing lists, instant messages, appointments, contacts, tasks, free-form notes, blogs, web pages, documents, spreadsheets, slide shows, bookmarks, photos, MP3's, and so on (and on). Data in Chandler is stored on repositories on the user's local machine, on others' machines, and on shared resources such as servers.

This is a very different approach from that of today's common PIMs. For example, users can usually only view a given email message in one specific folder, grouped only with other email messages. In the user-centric world of Chandler, the basis of the 'relatedness' of items is completely at the users discretion and is merely facilitated, rather than imposed by the software.

Chandler lets the user keep track of lots of concurrent, ongoing activities. Managing activity extending over time requires the ability to collect just the right sets of related items. Too much information and the user can't find what's relevant. Too little information and the needed item goes missing. This ability to gather relevant information from disparate sources is at the heart of Chandler's design. A Chandler user could, for example, relate a variety of emails, contacts, documents, and calendar events into an ad-hoc collection related to a specific project.

Chandler will provide unified search over all of the user's information, both on her own personal computer(s) and stored in other Chandler repositories across the network. It will allow searches to be saved for re-use.

Chandler will give non-programming users the ability to customize and extend the program in all sorts of ways, for instance, providing ways to automatically manage complex, asynchronous tasks like organizing a meeting and to automatically respond to events as they arise.

Power Email

With Chandler, users will be able to manage large volumes of email more efficiently and effectively than with current email clients. In addition to reducing the number of keystrokes and mouse actions needed to process messages, Chandler will have easy-to-use tools to assist users in organizing and prioritizing their messages.

In particular, we recognize that people use email as a form of very lightweight "to-do" list, leaving messages in a very visible place until they have been read, acted on, and/or replied to. Chandler will have explicit (but still very lightweight) features to facilitate the "task management" aspects of email. (Naturally, Chandler will also support plug-ins for state-of-the-art spam filters so such messages never appear on the "email to-do list".)

Calendar

Chandler will enable people to easily share rich calendar information -- including free/busy time -- on an ad-hoc basis. In particular, today's users can only share and use free/busy time with other users of expensive, centrally managed server-based products. Chandler's peer-to-peer calendaring system will enable any subgroup of Chandler users -- a small business, a study group, a non-profit's board, or even

people planning a surprise birthday party -- to efficiently schedule meetings, browse the calendars of others, and see overlays of multiple calendars simultaneously.

Sharing and Collaboration

Chandler will make it extremely easy to share all types of information with others, not just calendars, enabling much closer interaction, reduction of effort, and coordination of activity.

Chandler facilitates information synchronization and updating between repositories. If a user has subscribed to another's Contacts information, and then that information changes, then those changes will automatically propagate to the first user and update her repository.

Chandler's collaboration environment can be used to facilitate discussion, organize and coordinate projects, create and review documents, and manage the flow of information and tasks.

Chandler collaboration capabilities are built on top of two coordinated capabilities: the sending and receiving messages which form a stream (email, IM's, even blogs), and creating, reviewing, and publishing documents (web pages, word processing).

Chandler as a Platform

Chandler isn't limited to the features that OSAF provides. Besides being a powerful application, it's also an extensible platform that can be both employed and further extended by programmers and end-users in many different ways.

End users can create highly customized views of the universe of data that they have access to, intermixing local and remote data with sophisticated sharing policies for intimate control over access. They can customize the look and feel of the application, changing colors, images, etc., as well as add new buttons and menu items and other widgets to perform custom tasks using easy graphical scripting. Finally, end users can instruct agents to perform complex actions which take place over a span of time automatically

Programmers can create new parcels (the basic unit of organization of Chandler code) to manage any type of information. Parcels themselves are written in wxPython (Python + wxWindows) and can do practically

anything and have access to all of Chandler's subsystems. Parcels can contain agents that can automatically respond to events on the user's behalf.

Chandler's building blocks can be used independently from the Chandler the application. wxPython integrated with a persistent object database allows for easy prototyping and development. Developers can leverage networking, sharing and security frameworks and UI frameworks to create a new breed of information-centric Internet applications.

Background

OSAF's October 2002 mission statement emphasized several key attributes of Chandler: the easy sharing of information, the ability for Chandler users to work independent of external administration and servers, and a commitment to overall quality of software. Since then there has been much excitement among diverse groups about what we are doing.

1. For members of the open source community, the creation of a well-funded project with a strong team focusing on a major end-user application represents an important development in itself.
2. A broad cross-section of users frustrated with the experience of the dominant incumbents in the email and calendar space see Chandler as an potential alternative.
3. Chandler's decentralized, server-optional architecture, which permits easy self-management of collaborative environments is highly appealing to people in a wide variety of work-related settings.
4. Linux and Mac users feel included, not left out as all too often they are.
5. Chandler fulfills the wishes of long-time Agenda devotees and fans/advocates of other orphaned PIMs like ECCO for a worthy contemporary successor.
6. Heavy users of email and calendar programs see Chandler as the ultimate power user product which will implement their feature wish list.
7. Developers are excited about the open-ended nature of Chandler as a platform, about the use of Python as the principal development language, wxWindows as our cross-platform GUI toolkit, and Jabber as a key component of our networking infrastructure.

In the months which have followed the opening of the OSAF web site, Chandler has evolved in some major ways due to our interaction with interested parties.

1. Chandler will work well in centrally-administered environments as well as decentralized ones.
2. We are working on a plan for a version of Chandler for colleges and universities
3. Extensibility will be built in at all levels of the program.
4. We have a clearer vision of Chandler as a platform as well as an application.