

Obolus

A Mailprocessor for the Macintosh

First public release, 1.0

July 20, 1993.

This is a small text file, which provides a modicum of documentation for the current version of Obolus. I don't think it is strictly necessary to read this file, but I would recommend it nevertheless. Obolus also has Balloon Help, so this document may be even less relevant than it otherwise might have been.

Generic Disclaimer

Inevitably, documentation contains a disclaimer. You are reading it now. I use Obolus daily, and it appears to work just fine. However, I do not accept any responsibility for any damage the use of Obolus may cause, either to your harddisk, your computer, your mental health, or the health of your cat. This disclaimer also disclaims implicitly anything I may have forgotten to disclaim.

Why Obolus?

I began working on Obolus when I switched to the Mac for my Fidonet mail. At that time, not a single program I knew of could produce 4D compatible Fidonet packets, which was a real pain, as most bulletin board systems no longer want the hassle of fakenets that comes with the outmoded 3D addressing. I quickly cobbled together this kludge, now called Obolus, that would convert CounterPoint messages to 4D Fidonet packets. Since then, to my utter surprise, CounterPoint 2.3 has managed to enter the 1980s and now produces 4D packets as well. We're making progress.

Meanwhile, Obolus grew, thanks to the suggestions of the beta-testers, and now includes more than just the bare-bones conversion to 4D it originally had. For instance, Obolus uses Ziplt to compress your mailpackets.

What's Next?

My dissatisfaction was not limited solely to the packets CounterPoint produces; I am also writing my own mailreader, which naturally is 4D-aware. For instance, if you reply to netmail, it automatically fills in the correct reply address for you, including the point number of the addressee. CounterPoint seems blissfully oblivious of the existence of points. (You may notice, I don't particularly like CP.) The mailreader (nameless as yet) has not progressed to the stage where it is beta-testable. This will require some additional time, probably several months.

If you like CounterPoint as it is now, it is unlikely you will need my mailreader; in fact, you will probably dislike it, and you may be better off just chucking Obolus in the trash. I can affirm however, that my mailreader will not suffer from the rampant featuritis that so disfigures CounterPoint. No cute icons for users, no sounds, no

biographies... just a simple, fast and functional mailreader. OK, so far it's all vaporware to you, so you'll have to wait to see if something ever comes of it.

Using Charon

As you may have guessed from the name of Obolus, it is designed to work with Charon, an EMSI/ZedZap Fidonet mailer for points. I strongly recommend using it.

Using CounterPoint

The current version of Obolus is mainly designed as a temporary patch, until such time as my own mailreader becomes available. In the interim, you will have to use CounterPoint for reading and writing messages. The situation is not optimal, and manifests some characteristics of a kludge, but it will have to do for the time being. Please read below how to install Obolus, and how to make it work with CounterPoint.

Obolus does mitigate some of CounterPoint's shortcomings, but it cannot perform magic. If CounterPoint decides to fill in a bad address for the addressee, there is nothing Obolus can do about it.

CounterPoint, on the face of it, appears to have an option for using a mail exporter, of Obolus's ilk, yet I have not been able to figure out how this is supposed to work (this at least was the case in CP 2.1. Version 2.3 appears to have changed in this respect, but I haven't used it). The easiest thing to do is, to launch either Charon or Obolus from the Finder; if you use "Call Boss" or somesuch option, CounterPoint will delete the outbound messages before Obolus can get at them. I can't recall the exact details of the circumstances; I tend to avoid CounterPoint as much as I can.

Installing Obolus

Installing Obolus is fairly simple, or in any case, should be. Just double-click on the Obolus icon. Obolus will warn you in an alert box, that no configuration file was found. Obolus saves its preferences in the Preferences folder in the System folder. All dialog boxes in Obolus are modeless, meaning that you can switch applications while the dialog boxes are active. In the "configuration" menu, you will find four items, each of which is described below.

The "Behavior" Dialog

This dialog controls Obolus's general behavior. There are currently nine checkboxes. If checked, the first item, "Run in unattended mode", will cause Obolus to start processing mail immediately after it has been launched, either from the Finder, or from Charon. You will probably use the "unattended" mode in conjunction with Charon, so that you don't have to perform any additional actions to process your mail. The "unattended" mode can be disabled by keeping the "Option" key pressed when Obolus is launched.

- "Suppress detailed progress info" suppresses the verbose message output in the progress window created by Obolus when processing mail. If the number of messages you need to process is great, this can cause a slowdown in Obolus's throughput. See the speed comparisons below.

- "Enable Internet email routing" is an option for those who wish to send email to Internet addresses regularly. First of all, you need to know the Fidonet address and name of an Internet gateway, and you must be allowed access to them. The name is

usually something like “UUCP” or “Postmaster.” The Fido-address should be a 4D Fido address (e.g. 2:281/527.0). You can enter the address and name of the gateway by choosing the “Internet Routing...” menu.

To send an Internet email, you can enter in CounterPoint in the “To:” field the Internet ID of the addressee, e.g. “qsi@contrast.wlink.nl”. Obolus assumes that any addressee whose name contains the “@” character is in Internet, and will reroute the netmail to the Internet gateway you specify. The routing will override any Fido destination address that may be present in the message itself. Obolus also adds a “To:” line to the email, so that the gateway knows where to send it.

Netmail sent to users whose names do not contain the “@” character, will be treated as normal netmails. None of the above applies if you disable this option. If you enable this option, you must specify a valid Fido-address and name for the gateway.

(And yes, I know, CP has an “Internet ID” option, but it is wholly unclear to me what it is supposed to do.)

- “Copy processed packets for CP Import” makes copies of the packets processed, so that CounterPoint can import them. Charon deletes the packets it sends successfully. See the Charon documentation for further details. If you don’t check this box, and you don’t copy the packets manually, the messages you’ve written will not appear in CounterPoint. They will be lost forever.

- “Delete queue messages when done” causes Obolus to delete the messages it has exported successfully, and causes the “Queue List” to be deleted also. If you’re scared Obolus will destroy the messages you’ve written, or are trying to trace a bug in Obolus, you may want to leave this option unchecked. Normally, you’d have it checked, though.

- “Use Ziplt to compress packets” will launch Ziplt after Obolus has finished processing your mail. Obolus will send Ziplt instructions to compress your mail.

- “Launch Charon when done” will launch Charon after Obolus has finished processing the outbound mail. If Obolus was launched from Charon, Obolus quits and returns control to Charon, without attempting to launch it.

- “Write Log File” keeps a log of all of Obolus’s activities. The log file is created in the same folder where CounterPoint is located. Please note that Obolus always adds to the text file, so it can grow quite large after some time.

- “Detailed log info in file” causes Obolus to write more information to the log file. Use this option if you think Obolus is doing something wrong.

- In the final item in the dialog, “Logfile Creator”, you can specify what the creator ID will be of the logfile Obolus produces. This determines which application will be launched when you open the logfile in the Finder. The default is “txt”, which is the Creator ID of Apple’s “TeachText” application.

The “Addresses” Dialog

In the “Addresses” dialog, you must supply your addresses. You must specify at least one valid Fidonet-address, in the “Main Address” field. The address must be supplied in standard Fidonet format, e.g. “2:281/527.13”. The password is optional, and should be used in consultation with your boss.

The “System Paths” Dialog

In the “System Paths” dialog, you must specify the locations of the various files

Obolus needs to function properly. First off, you must enter the location of Charon. As with all the paths, you can do this either by typing in the full pathname (tedious), or you can click on the button to the left of the textfield, which will bring up a standard file dialog, which allows you to select the location of the file or folder in question.

The “Queue Folder” is the folder where CounterPoint stores the outbound messages. It is usually in the “Mail” folder created by CounterPoint, but this could be different on your system.

“Ziplt” is the place where Ziplt is on your system.

“Outbound” is the folder where Obolus will create the packets, ready for export. For every boss, Obolus will create a folder named after the boss. For example, if your address is 2:282/301.17, Obolus will create a folder in the “Outbound” folder named “2.282.301”. Please note that this differs slightly from Charon’s definition of “outbound” folder. (Yeah, we’ll try and synchronize this a bit). The reason for this is to allow multi-boss support. Charon’s “Outbound” folder is the folder (e.g. “2.282.301”) created by Obolus.

Lastly, “CP Import” folder is the Folder where CounterPoint expects to find its packets to import.

In this dialog, slightly incongruously, I admit, you can also specify the origin-line you wish Obolus to use. Obolus can use only one origin line.

The “Internet Routing” Dialog

In this dialog you can specify an Internet gateway, through which your emails can be routed. To use this feature, check the appropriate button the in “Behavior” Dialog. The name of the gateway is the name of the Fidonet “point” that is the mailrobot which handles the gateway (usually “UUCP” or “Postmaster” or something). The address is its Fidonet address. Fill in a 4D address, e.g. 2:281/527.0.

Processing Mail

The heart of Obolus is the mail processing. You can start processing mail, either by launching Obolus in “unattended mode” (see above), or you can select the menu item labeled “Process Mail.” First, if you changed any of the settings, Obolus will save the new configuration to disk. Then, Obolus will look for a file called “Queue List” in the folder you specified (see above), and then process the mail one message at a time. The “Queue List” file is created by CounterPoint, and contains the names of the files that should be processed. If you have not checked the “Suppress detailed progress info” box (see above), you will see briefly in the window which message is being processed, and where it is routed. If you have just one boss, routing is no problem, but with a multi-boss setup, you may wish to examine the routing more closely, should anything go wrong. If you have selected detailed log info, this information will be written to the log file as well. The “Abort” button does not work at the moment. This will be implemented soon. I hope.

Quitting

Quitting is fairly straightforward, and largely speaks for itself. Obolus will save any altered setting automatically when you quit. If you run Obolus in “unattended” mode, Obolus will quit immediately after it has processed your mail.

Speed

I am obsessed with speed. I want everything to go as quickly as possible, and to this end, I have optimized Obolus for speedy processing of mail. In the log file, you will find the time it took for Obolus to process messages; this time does not include the time taken to copy packets. If you have only a few pending outbound messages, speed will not be much of an issue, and Obolus will exit again quickly. To test Obolus's speed on huge amounts of data, I saved all my outbound mail for several weeks, and then let Obolus process it. The results (taken from the actual log file) are as follows:

Full graphics output, detailed log:

04/11/93 17:08:42 113 messages (204185 bytes) processed in 15.43 seconds (7.32 msgs/sec, 13230.13 bytes/sec)

Full graphics output, normal log:

04/11/93 17:13:57 113 messages (204185 bytes) processed in 15.02 seconds (7.52 msgs/sec, 13597.23 bytes/sec)

Suppressed graphics output, detailed log:

04/11/93 17:10:56 113 messages (204185 bytes) processed in 13.42 seconds (8.42 msgs/sec, 15218.76 bytes/sec)

Suppressed graphics output, normal log:

04/11/93 16:45:33 113 messages (204185 bytes) processed in 12.08 seconds (9.35 msgs/sec, 16898.07 bytes/sec)

As you can see, the fastest mode is about 27% faster than the slowest. When processing just a handful of messages, the difference is imperceptible. These values were obtained on my IIsi, and a heavily fragmented harddisk. Your mileage may vary.

System Requirements

Obolus should run on any Mac, with System 6 or later. If it doesn't, I would certainly like to hear about it. Some features of Obolus (launching Charon, for instance) require System 7. If you are still using System 6, I strongly recommend you leave your perch atop the trees, and join homo sapiens on the next step of the evolutionary ladder. (I would like to know how many of you still use System 6).

Future Features

Among the features of Obolus that remain yet to be implemented, is crashmail. Currently, you cannot yet send crashmail with Obolus.

Feedback

If you encounter a bug, I need to know about it before I can fix it. I would very much like to hear from you what you like and what you dislike about Obolus, in order that I may effect changes. Even minor (and trivial) comments are appreciated. I can be reached in Fidonet at address 2:281/527.13, and some Macintosh echoes (MACNL.281, MACSW, ECHOMAC). The fastest way is probably my Internet address, qsi@contrast.wlink.nl. My snailmail address is Schouwweg 4, 2243 BA Wassenaar, The Netherlands.

Pecuniary Remuneration

There is no compulsory need for this. On the other hand, if you absolutely insist, I

naturally cannot refuse. (An obol would be just fine, for starters.)

The final public release of Obolus is freeware, meaning that you can copy it as much as you like, provided you do not alter it in any way.

Ehrm...

I think that about wraps it up, as far as the documentation goes. I hope you derive some use from Obolus. Thanks for taking the time to read all this.

- Peter Kocourek.