

By [Miron2007](#), Editor, Software Reviews

[Y!IM, MSN, AIM, ICQ, Jabber, GTalk and QQ Shake Hands](#)

Talk is cheap

Communication is the most common activity of a human being. It comes in many forms: oral, written, sign language, body language etc. and... instant messaging. Talking is an innate need of a person and no matter his or her abilities, the human being will always find a way to communicate a message, a feeling, a state of mind etc. Reaching an unknown territory and trying to talk to the "natives", until learning the new language a human will try to transmit messages as accurately as possible. For this to happen, words from both languages are used and combined. This mix is called "pidgin". The same is called the former **GAIM** application designed to unite the users of different instant messengers. "Creole" is the next step of "pidgin" development and consists in a standardization, a stabilization. Pidgin, as you all know is a handy tool that gathers various instant messaging services under one big umbrella. Following AOL's notice of infringement of AIM mark, GAIM had to take some action in order to survive and changed its name into Pidgin. The name in my opinion has a twofold meaning. Most people mistake it for "pigeon" and due to the resounding resemblance who can blame them? A pigeon used to be employed for carrying the messages to a distant destination and Pidgin does exactly the same. The interface is as Spartan as ever and it echoes nothing but utility and functionality. Immediately after installation (GTK included) you can start adding your accounts. The supported IMs available in Pidgin keep multiplying from one release to another and now, besides the regular service provided by **Yahoo!**, **MSN** and **AIM**, it features a set of nine other IMs like **Gadu-Gadu** (chitter-chatter in Polish), **QQ**, **ICQ**, **IRC**, **GroupWise**, **SILC** (Secure Internet Live Conferencing), **SIMPLE**, **Sametime** and **Jabber** protocol. The list is impressive considering that many people limit to using just a few of them. All you have to do is fill in the required fields and make the appropriate settings for the server and proxy and that is it. There is no instant messenger list importing operation, you do not have to re-create the buddies groups or other complicated task. You can even have more than one account enabled and all the contacts will be appended to the same list. Juggling with the accounts is easy as you can automatically sign in in each of them and you Pidgin allows you to disable/enable them anytime you want to. I will not go through the options available in **Buddies** menu as everyone knows them. Suffice to say that chat rooms, adding buddies or groups is a cinch. In Accounts you get to handle the messenger IDs and enable different protocols. I juggled with four different protocols and I must say that there was not the slightest sign of instability from Pidgin (except for when I tried to add a FLAC audio file to the Sounds section in preferences and the software crashed). The core of the application is of course in Tools menu. The first option available is called **Buddy Pounces**. This allows the user to customize the actions of certain buddies in the list. Sending a message, signing on/off, starting typing, pausing or stopping typing are the actions that can be signaled to you. These events can be defined by you for each user and a when one of them occurs Pidgin can open the IM window, pop up a notification, send a message to the distant user, execute a command or play a user defined sound. Pidgin comes equipped with a list of **plugins** designed to add more value to the software. The list is pretty long and the plugins are as varied as can be. From auto-accepting files transfer requests from the buddies in the list, customizing the colors of the conversation, offline messages notification to periodically checking for new versions, automatically replacing user defined text in conversation and displaying timestamps and applying a certain level of transparency to buddy list and conversation. Each and every plugin can be customized to a certain extent by the user. For details on the author of the plugin it is enough to expand the Plugin Details section at the bottom of the Plugins window. Some of the items in the list may not work for all protocols, but you will be warned about this in the details window. Additionally, you can learn about the website where it is published and in some cases you even get the e-mail address of the author. Preferences window allows minimum **customization of Pidgin**, starting with the interface and ending with status monitoring method. Along the way you will be able to make some adjustments regarding the conversations window, the smileys, sounds (you can add your own sound, but I suggest you stay put as crashes are to come if you tamper). The preferences window also allows you to set the format of log recording to either plain text or to HTML. The **log** can be tailored according to your wishes, meaning that all instant messages, all

chats and all status changes to system log can be recorded. Status/Idle tab deals with the ways of reporting idle time, auto-reply, idle time for status changing and startup status. For not being contacted by any person that finds out your ID, ICQ number or IM address you can set the privacy options and allow this privilege only to the buddies in your list. These options can be set for each of your accounts. The application is truly a great asset if you want to combine the lists in different messengers into a single one. All the groups of friends/contacts are added into a single list and you can block some of your contacts, add new groups and handle them the way you need. **The Good** Pidgin combines the power of chat of 12 different IM clients. Considering that these are the most important on the market and that the application is free I would say that it deserves a round of applause. It is extremely easy to configure and installing it and adding your accounts won't take more than a couple of minutes. The list of incorporated plugins is truly amazing. Additionally, several items are waiting for a downloader on the publisher's page. **The Bad** Unfortunately this version of Pidgin shows it is a beta and there are several issues to be solved. In Buddy Pounces none of my settings could be saved and this kinda broke my crayons. Additionally, in Preferences, under Sounds, I could not change the audio file from the default one. At each attempt I benefited from a crash. I finally realized that I had to have a selection of an event for this to work, otherwise the application will terminate itself. The info on the buddies is not accurate, at least regarding the operating system (for Windows and Mac from what I have seen). Some of my buddies were using Vista and yet Pidgin claimed that they are using Windows 2000 or a new breed of Windows, NT11 i1586 in isolated cases of XP. In the case of Mac's Tiger I was given the Darwin 8.9.0 edition (from what I've been told this version is the equivalent of Windows 95). **The Truth** Pidgin does a great job in combining the powers of all the aforementioned protocols into one easy to use application. It is not as advanced as Y!IM, MSN or ICQ, but it works great with the basic functions of communication. You will not benefit from video/audio support (striking a deal with AOL to use their servers is very unlikely), but you can write to whoever you want with no restrictions. *Here are some snapshots of the application in action:*