From NetFlow to IPFIX
the evolution of IP flow information export

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What is IPFIX?

- Emerging IETF standard for flexible export of IP flow data from routers or other metering processes.
- Defines
  - a rich, easily extensible information model,
  - a template-driven data representation,
  - and a unidirectional protocol for export of IP flow data over a variety of transport protocols.
- Does not define specific requirements for flow assembly, flow key selection, etc.
History and Motivation

• IETF IPFIX working group started in 2001 to define a standard flow export protocol.

• Selected Cisco NetFlow V9 as a basis for this new protocol.
  – Evolution of previous NetFlow versions.
  – Added templates for flexible data definition.

• Developed protocol from this basis to meet defined requirements.
  – IPFIX information model is maintained as a superset of V9 information model, but otherwise the two are not directly interoperable without message translation.
Representation

- Templates in the message stream describe the data sets.
- Allows flexible and efficient representation of flows on the wire.
Information model

• The information model supports reporting a wide variety of information elements:
  – “Five-tuple” (IPv4, IPv6) and standard counters
  – Packet treatment: e.g., routed next hop and AS
  – Detailed counters: e.g., sum of squares, flag counters
  – Timestamps down to nanosecond resolution
  – Any ICMP, TCP, UDP header field
  – Layer 2, VLAN, MPLS, and other sub-IP information

• Flow keys are not limited to specific information elements.

• New IEs registered with IANA.

• Enterprise-specific IEs for private extensions.
Comparison to sFlow

• sFlow is a packet sampling protocol
  – Intended for many of the same applications as NetFlow and IPFIX.
  – Use of packet sampling instead of flow assembly reduces state overhead on measurement device.
  – Analogous to PSAMP, which extends IPFIX for export of sampled packet data.

• Both provide flexible export, but…
  – sFlow provides message types for flexibility,
  – IPFIX provides templates and information elements:
  – IPFIX allows definition of novel message types on the fly.
Status

• It’s taken longer than we’d thought, but we’re nearly done…

• Core IPFIX protocol documents completed in 2006, (probably) to be published as RFCs in 2007.

• Working group continuing to define extensions to and applications of the protocol.
  – Bidirectional flow export
  – Redundancy reduction for export efficiency
  – Flow storage and File-based interoperability
  – MIB and XML-based configuration for IPFIX devices
  – etc…

• Implementations tracking the draft standard available now.
Bidirectional Flow Export

• Bidirectional flow (biflow) metering and analysis is applicable to several use cases:
  – data reduction
  – separation of “answered” traffic from unanswered
  – full reconstruction of TCP sessions

• The IPFIX protocol has no direct support for single-record export of bidirectional flows (biflows).

• This extension allows “reversal” of any element within the Information Model for biflow export.

• To be published as an RFC this year.
Reducing Redundancy

• Technique for bandwidth-saving information export
  – Separates the export of flow records such that attributes common to several flow records are sent only once.
  – Links common flow properties to specific properties with a unique identifier.

• To be published as an RFC this year.
Flow Storage

• Many analysis tools interoperate not via direct communication, but via file exchange.
  – exchange available via a variety of transport methods (HTTP, FTP, SSH+SCP, SMTP+MIME, etc., etc.)
  – files support a variety of useful operations (compression, encryption, etc.)
  – files are a natural unit of grouping related flow data (e.g. a single security incident or query result).

• Existing de-facto standard for flow storage: NetFlow PDU files
  – Not extensible for data fields not in NetFlow.
Flow Storage: IPFIX as basis

- IPFIX defines a template-driven data representation and a rich, easily extensible information model, so:

- Ideal basis for a flow storage format
  - Extensible and self-describing, unlike V5 PDU files
  - Adequate semantic flexibility for flow data without overhead of e.g. XML.
  - Additional applicability to IPFIX (or NetFlow V9) collection infrastructures.
IPFIX Files

• An IPFIX file is any serialized stream of IPFIX Messages.
  – Alternately, a “file transport” for IPFIX.

• Provides a set of extensions:
  – File contents
  – Error detection and recovery
  – Extended type information for enterprise-specific information elements.

• To be published as an RFC in 2008.
IPFIX Implementations (1)

- **YAF (Yet Another Flowmeter)**
  - takes packets from the wire or libpcap dumpfiles.
  - writes IPFIX Files or exports IPFIX Messages.
  - supports bidirectional flow export.

- **SiLK (System for Internet Level Knowledge)**
  - large-scale flow storage and command-line analysis suite.
  - supports NetFlow V5 and IPFIX flow collection.
  - can analyze IPFIX Files directly, as well.

- **libfixbuf: an IPFIX library in C**
  - Used by YAF and SiLK

- **Available from [http://tools.netsa.cert.org](http://tools.netsa.cert.org/)**
IPFIX Implementations (2)

• OpenIMP
  – provides metering processes, export/collection, and analysis tools.
  – specifically focused on active and passive quality of service measurement.
  – available from http://www.ip-measurement.org/openimp/

• libipfix: another IPFIX library in C
  – supports Reducing Redundancy extension
  – supports IPFIX File and mysql storage
  – used by OpenIMP
IPFIX Implementations (3)

• Versatile Monitoring Toolkit (VERMONT)
  – provides metering processes, export/collection, and monitoring tools.
  – implements IPFIX and related PSAMP (packet sampling) protocol.
  – available from http://vermont.berlios.de/

• ntop
  – web-based traffic measurement application
  – acts as IPFIX collecting process
  – available from http://www.ntop.org/
FIN

• IPFIX is an emerging standard for flexible flow export, representation, and storage.
  – For those who want to follow the progress:

• Implementations available now
  – IPFIX interoperability events in July ‘05, March ‘06, and November ‘06 so far.
Questions?

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