IP Flow Information eXport (IPFIX)

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Outline

• IPFIX
• Terminology
• Applicability
• Initial Goals
• Current Status
  – Rough consensus (Internet-Drafts and RFCs)
  – Running code (Implementations)
• Conclusions
IP Flow Information eXport

- General data transport protocol
- Flexible flow key (selection)
- Flexible flow export - TEMPLATE BASED
  - New fields can be added to flow records without changing the structure of the record format
  - The collector can always interpret flow records
  - external data format description → compact encoding

- Efficient data representation
  - Extensible (future attributes to be added)
  - Flexible (customisable)
  - Independent (of the Transport protocol)
Terminology

• A TEMPLATE is an ordered sequence of \(<\text{type},\text{length}>\) pairs
  – specify the structure and semantics of a particular set of information (Information Elements)

• DATA RECORDS contain values of parameters specified in a template record

• OPTION RECORDS define the
  – structure and interpretation of a data record
  – how to scope the applicability
The protocol

- Unidirectional (push mode)
- The exporter sends data (and option) templates
  - Information Elements descriptions
- Information Elements are sent in network byte order
Applicability

• Target applications requiring flow-based IP traffic measurements (RFC 3917)
  – Usage-based accounting
  – Traffic profiling
  – Attack/intrusion detection
  – QoS monitoring
  – Traffic engineering

• Other applications (AS):
  – Network planning
  – Peering agreements
Attack / intrusion detection

• IPFIX provides input to attack / intrusion detection functions:
  – Unusually high loads
  – Number of flows
  – Number of packets of a specific type
  – Flow volume
  – Source and destination address
  – Start time of flows
  – TCP flags
  – Application ports
Define the notion of a "standard IP flow"

A **Flow** is a set of IP packets passing an Observation Point in the network during a certain time interval. All packets belonging to a particular flow have a set of common properties defined as the result of applying a function to the values of:

- One or more packet header field (e.g. dest. IP address), transport header field (e.g. dest. port number), or application header field (e.g. RTP header fields RTP-HDRF)
- One or more characteristics of the packet itself (e.g. # of MPLS labels)
- One or more fields derived from packet treatment (e.g. next hop IP address)
Initial Goals 2/4

• Devise data encodings that support analysis of IPv4 and IPv6 unicast and multicast flows…
  – IPFIX Information Model
    • formal description of IPFIX information elements (fields), their name, type and additional semantic information

• Consider the notion of IP flow information export based upon packet sampling
  – The flow definition includes packets selected by a sampling mechanism
  – Through option templates, the configuration sampling parameters can be reported
Initial Goals 3/4

• Identify and address any security concerns affecting flow data.
  – Disclosure of flow info data
  – Confidentiality $\rightarrow$ IPSec and TLS
  – Forgery of flow records
  – Authentication and integrity $\rightarrow$ IPSec and TLS

• Specify the transport mapping for carrying IP flow information $\rightarrow$ SCTP / SCTP-PR
  – Reliable (or partially reliable)
  – Congestion aware
  – Simpler state machine than TCP
Initial Goals 4/4

• **Ensure that the flow export system is reliable** (minimize the likelihood of flow data being lost and to accurately report such loss if it occurs).

  – SCTP, TCP
  – UDP
    • Templates are resent at a regular time interval

  – Sequence numbers
Current status

• Internet-Drafts (~ sent to the IESG):
  – Architecture for IP Flow Information Export
  – Information Model for IP Flow Information Export
  – IPFIX Protocol Specification
  – IPFIX Applicability

• Request For Comments:
  – Requirements for IP Flow Information Export (RFC 3917)
  – Evaluation of Candidate Protocols for IP Flow Information Export (IPFIX) (RFC 3955)
Other related drafts

- Export of per packet information with IPFIX
  - E.Boschi, L.Mark draft-boschi-export-perpktinfo-00.txt
- IPFIX aggregation
  - F.Dressler, C.Sommer, G.Munz draft-dressler-ipfix-aggregation-01.txt
- Simple IPFIX Files for Persistent Storage
  - B.Trammell draft-trammell-ipfix-file-00.txt
- IPFIX templates for common ISP usage
  - E.Stephan, E. Moureau draft-stephan-isp-templates-00.txt
- IPFIX Protocol Specifications for Billing
  - B.Claise, P.Aitken, R.Stewart draft-bclaise-ipfix-reliability-00.txt
- IPFIX Implementation Guidelines
At least 6 different IPFIX implementations
- Ours is open source: http://www.6qm.org/downloads.php

Implementers mailing list

Interoperability events
- Further tests planned

Implementation guidelines in preparation
Conclusions

• IPFIX is the upcoming standard for (IP) flow information export
• Allows common analysis tools
• Data exchange

... questions?
IPFIX message format

- IPFIX message
  - message header
  - 1 or more \{template, option template, data\} sets

- A TEMPLATE is an ordered sequence of <type, length> pairs used to completely specify the structure and semantics of a particular set of information
  - (unique by means of a template ID)
  - DATA RECORDS contain values of parameters specified in a template record
  - Field values are encoded according to their data type specified in IPFIX-INFO
  - OPTION RECORDS define the structure and interpretation of a data record including how to scope the applicability
INFORMATION ELEMENTS

• INFORMATION ELEMENTS are descriptions of attributes which may appear in an IPFIX record
  – IANA assigned
  – Defined in the Information Model
  – Enterprise specific (proprietary I.E.)

• Variable Length I.E.
  – The length is carried in the information element content itself

• The type associated with an IE
  – indicates constraints on what it may contains
  – determines the valid encoding mechanisms for use in IPFIX

• I.E.s must be sent in network byte order (big endian)
INFORMATION ELEMENTS

- The elements are grouped into 9 groups according to their semantics and their applicability:

1. Identifiers
2. Metering and Exporting Process Properties
3. IP Header Fields
4. Transport Header Fields
5. Sub-IP Header Fields
6. Derived Packet Properties
7. Min/Max Flow Properties
8. Flow Time Stamps
9. Per-Flow Counters
10. Miscellaneous Flow Properties

{can serve as Flow Keys
(used for mapping packets to Flows)}
Requirements for the data model

• IPFIX is intended to be deployed in high speed routers and to be used for exporting at high flow rates

• Efficiency of data representation
• How data is represented = data model

• EXTENSIBLE
  – For future attributes to be added

• FLEXIBLE
  – Concerning the attributes (customisable)

• INDEPENDENT
  – Of the transport protocol