01 Getting Started

Getting familiar with federation and how ourch.at works

- What is federation, and why?
- What is ourch.at, and how does it work?
- How do I sign up for ourch.at?

What is federation, and why?

https://urbanists.video/videos/embed/kzEGiRGtFjV4VTngLRxxbo

I made a video explaining ourch.at if you hate reading, which you can watch above!

Why the web sucks now

The original vision of the web was an open protocol that anyone could build on. Then, people became billionaires by creating their own walled gardens inside the open ecosystem of the web, and called them "platforms."

If you want to see instagram posts, you need to use instagram.

If a shitty billionaire buys the platform you use and enshittifies it, you can't take your followers elsewhere. They're locked into that platform, and so are you. This is not good, and it's no longer viable now that the attention economy is making us so unhappy.

Federation as a solution

Federation is the idea that we should have social media that is decentralized in the same way that email is decentralized. Nobody owns email. If I have an email address ending in @gmail.com, that doesn't prohibit me from emailing people with an address ending in @yahoo.com or @hotmail.com or any other domain. It's an open, interoperable protocol that we all use all the time!

So if email is the protocol, what's the social media protocol? It's an open standard called **ActivityPub**. You even get an address kind of like with email!

- My social media address is *@rob@mic.ourch.at*
- My audio address is *@rob@aud.ourch.at*
- My messaging address is *@rob@m.ourch.at*

How do these work in practice, though? I'll use my server, ourch.at, as an example.

mic.ourch.at (twitter-like)

This website runs an app called "Mastodon", which is a microblogging platform kind of like Twitter or Threads. There are tons of apps that implement the ActivityPub protocol, and Mastodon is just one of them! I chose it because it's the most popular and feature-complete ActivityPub-based social

media app so far.

You're not limited to following and interacting with other people who use servers running Mastodon, though!! Any server running an app that uses the ActivityPub protocol can talk to any other server running an app that uses the ActivityPub protocol, regardless of the app.

aud.ourch.at (spotify-like)

This website runs an app called FunkWhale that basically acts as a music server for hosting your audio files, which is great for streaming from your phone and other computers! I like to connect to aud.ourch.at using the Amperfy app, which has a way better user experience.

msg.ourch.at (discord-like)

This one works just a little differently! Your address will use the format yourname@m.ourch.at, because that's where the "Matrix" messaging server is installed. However, m.ourch.at doesn't actually have any front-end interface at all! For that, you can go to msg.ourch.at, which runs a front-end called Element to facilitate the messaging. Technically, though, you could send messages through your @m.ourch.at email address using whatever matrix-enabled app you want.

What is ourch.at, and how does it work?

ourch.at is Rob Robinson's self-hosted server!

When I decided that I wanted digital independence from billionaires for myself, I decided that I wanted to self-host my federated accounts instead of depending on someone else's server.

I chose the name ourch.at because it's short, the domain name was cheap, and it's basically conveys the meaning that this is something for us, a community I want to help catalyze but not ultimately own. **It's supposed to read as "Our Chat"**, although I recognize it's a little imperfect and clunky. Whatever, I bought it on impulse and it's good enough.

I pay for server space through Infomaniak, a Swiss web hosting company. Switzerland has some of the best web privacy and security protections in the world. Right now, it doesn't cost all that much, but eventually if we all use this enough, I might someday ask for voluntary donations to help keep the server alive as things get more expensive.

This server runs something called "Yunohost", which basically makes it easy to self-host stuff on a webserver. All the applications I have installed today are compatible with Yunohost user accounts, meaning you can use just one log in for any of the apps installed on ourch.at! If you actually go to ourch.at, you'll see a little dashboard of applications. That's Yunohost!

The different apps are each installed on their own domain. Mastodon (twitter-like) is installed at mic.ourch.at, FunkWhale (Spotify-like) is installed at aud.ourch.at, Element (Discord-like) is installed at msg.ourch.at, and you're currently on wiki.ourch.at!

Is ourch.at open to anybody to sign up?

No!! This is for the homies only. Sorry, server space costs money and I don't want to moderate the content of people I do not trust. If you want an account, follow these instructions:

How do I sign up for ourch.at?

Sign-up instructions

> I am not opening sign ups for ourch.at to the general public for a bunch of reasons. I only want to host fediverse accounts for the homies for a bunch of reasons.

To request an account:

1. Hit Rob Robinson up and send him the username you want use (this is the thing that goes before the @mic.ourch.at, for example mine is rob@aud.ourch.at)
2. Rob will make your account with a temporary password. It will be a string of 10 random characters.
3. Log into your account with your username and temporary password. Then, click "Edit my profile" in the bottom right of the page and change your password.

> Yunohost doesn't support multifactor authentication yet (boo!!!), so please use a unique password for this account!! I don't want someone finding the same password you use for everything after a data breach and using it to log in here. **PASSWORD MANAGERS ARE YOUR FRIEND!!!!**