CONNECTION MAGIC

Several different Advantage Software products now communicate with each other, and with other products, through a system we call Connection Magic. This system can work either throught the Internet or through a LAN, and most features are available no matter which method you're using to connect.

In Eclipse, going to Tools/Connection Magic/View connections allows you to see status information about the current connection, including status such as “Connected”, “LAN connected” or “Connection offline”, and a list of active sessions and what users are attending them.

Internet

This system normally works through the Internet. If you are using an Advantage Software product, it will attempt to establish a connection to the Internet as soon as you run it so that these connectivity features will be available instantly. This means that you can connect to any other user on the planet who is also running a program that is simultaneously in contact with the Connection Magic server.

This method of connecting takes no extra setup. If you have an Internet connection, it just works.

LAN

It can also work through a LAN (Local Area Network.) This can mean something as large as a courthouse network spreading throughout an entire building or even several buildings. However, a typical portable LAN setup for court reporters would be an instance where a reporter brings a wi-fi router to a job and all of the attendees who wish to view realtime connect to that router.

If you are going to use these features on a LAN, you must run Connection Magic Local. This is a version of the same server software that is running on the Internet, and can be downloaded from the Advantage Software website (CMLocalSetup.exe)

Only one copy of the Connection Magic Local server software needs to be running on a network to allow Advantage Software products to talk to each other, even if there are many sessions running. For example, a courthouse could run a single copy of the server on any computer on the network and it could manage several simultaneous realtime sessions in several courtrooms. With the portable router solution, a reporter will generally run the server software on their own computer along with Eclipse.

This server software shows the IP address of the computer where the server is running. This information may be helpful for troubleshooting purposes or for manually configuring a connection. It also shows a scrolling status window that can be used to monitor connections and disconnections and opening and closing of communication sessions.

Communication sessions

In order to send data through the Connection Magic system, features will open up communication sessions. Think of this like a chat room or a forum: everyone who joins that session can then share information or see information that is being shared. Keep in mind that each session may be used for very different purposes. For example, one session may be for sharing a document for editing purposes, and another session may be for sending realtime data to attorneys. These sessions will have different names and different users attending them, each of which will have different capabilities.

Whenever a session is started for any reason, a session dialog will appear that asks you to supply a session name, a password, and whether or not that session should be publicly visible. If it is not public, users will have to know the session name and be able to type it in to join. The default name will be the name of the job, sometimes with additional letters appended for convenience, such as BR for Bridge output, ED for shared editing, and numbers representing the date.

Realtime viewing

The “Connection Magic” device type listed under the User settings/Realtime/Output/device types can be used to communicate with any software that can work with the Connection Magic infrastructure. Currently, that includes Bridge and Bridge Mobile.

When you start a realtime translation, you will be asked to supply session information such as the name/password, etc.

The process of connecting in Bridge is extremely simple. In the Bridge settings, select "Connection Magic" as the input type. The Bridge user can optionally supply a user name if they wish to be identifiable.

When you hit the "Connect" button in Bridge or Bridge Mobile, you can type a session name or select one from a list, and type a password.

The connection from Eclipse to Bridge through the Internet server tracks of all of the data that has been transmitted. If any text is missing, it will request the missing text from the Eclipse side. This means that if a Bridge user hooks up late, or if the connection drops briefly and then automatically reconnects, Bridge will still get all of the text that was sent from Eclipse.

In the process of making adjustments to the Bridge output, a change was made to the way that globals are transmitted. Previously, some globals were transmitted to Bridge as text find/replace commands, which was a fairly inexact and unreliable way to apply globals.

The actual refresh command that retransmits the entire text of the paragraph is a much more reliable way to send all edits, so the globaling functions now use that feature, instead. It takes more time, but the small amounts of text that are transmitted no longer matter when using LAN and Internet bandwidth, compared to the serial-port-based systems used historically.

What the globaling procedure will now do is when it detects that a paragraph has changed as the result of a global, it will send a retransmit command for that paragraph to be transmitted to the Bridge output. That means that all globals will be reflected on the Bridge side no matter what the size or content, as long as you have the "apply edits" feature turned on.

Live Editing

It is now possible for multiple users to simultaneously edit the same document.

With a document on the screen, go to Tools/Connection Magic/Share current document. You will be presented with the session dialog. Select your preferences and hit OK.

That will start the collaborative editing session. Scopists can then go to Tools/Connection Magic/Edit shared document. This will list all available public editing sessions, or will allow them to type the name of a session if you have not made it public. Once they join a session, they will have to type a password if you have specified one.

A collaborative editing sends any and all edits across the communications system so that everyone in the session will see everyone's work. In the event of any synchronization problems, all of the documents will be made to match the master document being shared, which is normally the reporter's copy.

This feature may be executed on a realtime document; you can start realtime first and then share the document. There is a shortcut to do this: The translate notes dialog has a checkbox for sharing the document. If you check that box, then as soon as the translation starts you will get the share dialog just as if you had pressed the "Share document" button.

Each person editing the document will see, in addition to their own cursor, a cursor for each other user editing the document. These other cursors will have flags telling you who is editing in that location.

If any user performs a global of any kind, not only will the collaborative editing session reflect the edits as necessary, but the global itself will be entered into the appropriate dictionary on the other systems. In other words, if one user makes a global and puts it into a job dictionary, it will be entered into the job dictionary for that job on all of the computers in the editing session.

If any user in the collaborative editing session wants to send a message to the other users in the session, they can select Tools/Connection Magic/Send message. Type a message and hit [enter] and the other users will see it in the infobar or in the connections dialog.

If the system containing the shared document also has a WAV file for that job, anyone else sharing the document will be able to play the audio, as well. Users can just hit the Play button and receive the audio through the Internet connection from host document.

The system caches the audio in a local WAV file so that if you hit play repeatedly on the same audio in order to figure out what was said, it will only have to retrieve it through the Internet once.

Also, any audio you have played while connected will be available off-line if you later view the file while not connected to the reporter (though scopists should avoid opening the collaboration files while not connected since any edits will be erased if a subsequent collaboration session is started.)

If a reporter is doing realtime to Bridge and also has a collaborative editing session open, then when any scopist leaves a paragraph after making an edit, the reporter's system will send a refresh command to Bridge updating that paragraph, if applicable.

StenoLink Sessions

You can also use “Connection Magic” as a communications device type with the StenoLink output format on the reporter's system when doing realtime. This allows you to send realtime from a reporter to a scopist through the Internet session server.

Start the realtime on the reporter's side first, filling in the information in the session dialog as necessary. On the scopist's side, start a realtime job and you should get a list of available public sessions. If the reporter's session is not on the list, select the "[Join a session not listed]" option and type the name instead.

This works almost identically to the way that StenoLink works across a raw TCP-IP connection except that it's much easier to get going. Also, globals are now symmetrical. Any global that the scopist performs will show up on the reporter's computer, and any global that the reporter performs will show up on the scopist's computer.

The reality is that with the new collaborative editing system, StenoLink is essentially obsolete, so it is no longer recommended for collaboration between reporters and scopists.

Compatibility

The Connection Magic system's internal workings may be closed, but that doesn't mean we can't make it work with other CAT software.

There is a Connection Magic Link utility available on the Advantage Software website that can take CaseView (or Bridge) data from any CAT system and direct it to the Connection Magic system, meaning that it can be received by Bridge or Bridge Mobile through the Internet or LAN. This capability does require a special license that must be acquired from Advantage Software.

In the Connection Magic Link software, you configure a COM port to receive data from the CAT system (this port can be actual or virtual.) You start a communications session just as you would from within Eclipse, and then others can connect to it.

As soon as you start transmitting data from the CAT system, it is redirected through the Connection Magic system to the realtime viewers.

This system can be used by court reporters on any CAT software, including older versions of Eclipse which don't support Connection Magic directly.

Bridge Mobile

Bridge Mobile itself is a program with considerable functionality. It is designed to work on any mobile device with a full-featured web browser, from laptop computers to tablets to smart phones. App versions are being rolled out gradually, though any device can also use a browser to access the on-line version, or the version served by Connection Magic Local.

Here are some instructions on the features of Bridge Mobile, adapted from the help text that appears in Bridge Mobile itself when the help button is pressed.

Connecting

Press the Connect button to join a session. A dialog will open showing the available sessions:

Type or select the one you wish to connect to, enter a password, and press the check mark. You are now connected to a realtime stream. You can connect to more than one feed at the same time. Transcripts are saved automatically.

Display customization

Sidebar button - toggles on and off the sidebar, which displays the Word Index (which is automatically generated) and Notes.

Zoom in button - increases the size of the text in the transcript and the sidebar (index and notes).

Zoom out button - decreases the size of the text in the transcript and the sidebar.

The Settings/Display tab has 4 options that enable you to toggle on or off the displaying of Page and line numbering, Timecodes, Annotations, and Keyword highlighting.

The Settings/Keywords tab opens a data-entry field where you can type in keywords that you would like to highlight. When you add a word to this list, it will be highlighted throughout the document, including when it appears in realtime.

Navigation

Follow button - toggle between following along with the realtime and not following. When you're not following, a 5-line split realtime screen appears at the bottom of the screen. Note that you can also simply scroll up and down manually and the follow mode will automatically turn on and off.

Find button - opens a Search bar. Enter the word you want to find, and press the up or down arrow to search forward or backward from the cursor point. The word will be found either in the text or in any note.

You can also type page/line references such as 12/5, timecodes such as 9:35, or issues such as “Venue” (you can also simply hit the issue button instead of typing it.)

Sidebar Index - All the words in the transcript are automatically indexed and appear here. After each word is a list of the page and line numbers where it appears. You can navigate directly to any page/line reference by clicking on it.

Annotations (generic marks, issues, and notes) are listed at the top of the index in the order they appear in the document. If there is a note, the first few words of the note appear in the index, as well.

Annotation

Click to the left of the text to set or clear a generic mark.

If you wish to make a more detailed annotation, first select a line in the transcript display by left-clicking or touching it.

The Issue Bar button toggles the Issue Bar on and off. When on, it displays 6 issues at a time, with left/right arrow buttons to scroll through up to 24 issues.

Pressing an issue button will toggle that issue on or off for the highlighted line. You can customize the issues in the Issues tab of the Settings dialog.

You can select the note box and create a note, which will be associated with the selected line, and listed in the Index.

Saved transcripts

Press the folder icon to open the "Transcripts" dialog, select a previously saved transcript and hit the check button to open it. Documents recently received in realtime will be under the “unfiled” category.

There is a tab bar at the top that shows the name of the open transcripts. To close a feed or transcript, press the "x" beside the name. Press the exit button to close all open transcripts.

In the transcripts dialog, there are some additional controls:

The Cloud toggle button, if toggled on, will cause the currently selected transcript to be stored on the Internet in additional to the local device.

The Delete button will delete the currently selected transcript.

The Export button will open the export dialog.

In the export dialog, you can move the transcript to one of the cases listed, or create a new case indicated by the name you type into the text box.

Also in the export dialog, you can send the current transcript in an e-mail in either ASCII or PTF format to be imported into other software, such as on a desktop or laptop computer.

Note that in order to enable the cloud storage capability, you must register an e-mail address and password under Settings/Info. You will be required to verify your ownership of the e-mail address by clicking on a link in an e-mail that is sent to that address.