Broadcast and Multicast

CSE 486/586: Distributed Systems

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Multi-Process Communication

Distributed systems often send messages between multiple processes.

It can be convenient to model that as a single send with multiple recipients.

Modern communication networks do not always allow this.

Protocols above the transport layer can simulate this.
Unicast

Traditional network communications are unicast: one sender, one receiver.

TCP in particular is always unicast.

Unicast is the only reliably available method on the Internet.

This is a combination of several factors:

- The minimal requirements for IP’s network of networks
- Stateless routing of individual packets
- Unicast’s natural proof-of-stake limiting abuse potential
Broadcast

Broadcast sends messages to all recipients on a network.

This is typically only available on local area networks.

The abuse and misconfiguration potential for broadcast is very high!

(Imagine sending a message to every computer on the Internet!)

Not all underlying networks are capable of broadcast.
Then there is something in between: **group multicast**.

Multicast sends a single message to **more than one** recipient.

Like broadcast, this works on **local networks**.

There is also **Internet routed** multicast!
(But you probably can’t use it.)

Multicast makes a lot of sense for distributed systems:

- Not every system on the network is part of the system
- Maybe more than one of them is
**Emulating Broadcast or Multicast**

Broadcast and multicast can be **emulated** with unicast.

A process makes **multiple unicast connections**, one to each recipient.

It sends a unicast message on each connection.

This is **more work** for the sender.

It does not require specific assistance from the network!
Multicast as a Service

Assume that the hosts $g_0, \ldots, g_n$ are in a group $G$.

Hosts from $G$ wish to send messages to all other hosts in $G$.

We will model group multicast as a service.

It has three operations:

- $\text{MSend}(m, G)$: Send the message $m$ to every host in $G$
- $\text{MRecv}(m)$: Receive the message $m$ from the network
- $\text{Deliver}(m)$: Asynchronously deliver $m$ to the application

Note that $\text{MRecv}$ and $\text{Deliver}$ are different steps!
Simple Multicast from Unicast

A host can *emulate multicast* using unicast as follows:

**MSend**\((m, G)\):

- for each \(g_i \in G\):
  - Send\((m, g_i)\)

**MRecv**\((m)\):

- Deliver\((m)\)
Sending a Message

$g_0$ issues $\text{MSend}(m_0, G)$
Sending a Message

\[ g_1 \text{ issues } \text{MSend}(m_1, G) \text{ but fails before sending to } g_0 \]
Simple Multicast Properties

What are the properties of this multicast?

Cost:
- $|G|$ messages to send to $|G|$ hosts

Reliability:
- If the sender does not fail, the messages are delivered

How does this seem?
Simple Multicast Properties

What are the properties of this multicast?

Cost:
- $|G|$ messages to send to $|G|$ hosts

Reliability:
- If the sender does not fail, the messages are delivered

How does this seem?

Cost: great! Reliability: could be better…

We will use MSend and MRecv to build more reliable protocols.
Building Reliable Multicast

We can build a reliable multicast using MSend and Deliver.

This multicast ensures that if any process receives a message, all processes receive the message.

We define two new primitives in terms of simple multicast:

\[
\text{R\_MCast}(m, G):
\]

\[
\text{MSend}(m, G)
\]

\[
\text{R\_MRecv}(m):
\]

\[
\text{if } m \text{ has not previously been received:}
\]

\[
\text{MSend}(m, G)
\]

\[
\text{Deliver}(m)
\]
Reliable Multicast Requirements

The receive rule requires message identification.

Unique identifiers can solve this:
- Globally unique (such as content addressing)
- Locally unique (each process $g_i \in G$ keeps a counter)

This each process delivers a message at most once.
Sending a Message

$g_0$ issues $\text{R\_MCast}(m_0, G)$
Sending a Message

$g_2$ processes $R\_MRecv(m_0)$ and issues $R\_MCast(m_0, G)$
Sending a Message

\[ g_1 \text{ processes } R\text{-MRecv}(m_0) \text{ and issues } R\text{-MCast}(m_0, G) \]
Sending a Message

$g_0$ issues $R\_MCast(m_1, G)$ but fails before sending to $g_1$
Sending a Message

\[ g_0 \]
\[ g_1 \]
\[ g_2 \]

\[ g_2 \text{ processes } R\_\text{MRecv}(m_1) \text{ and issues } R\_\text{MCast}(m_1, G) \]
Sending a Message

g_1 processes R_MRecv(m_1) and issues R_MCast(m_1, G)
Reliable Multicast Properties

Cost:
- Much more expensive than simple multicast!
- $O(|G|^2)$ messages are sent.

Reliability:
- If any receiver does not fail, all non-failed receivers receive the message.

If the cost can be borne, the benefit is agreement on what was received.
Ordering Messages

There is value to ordering multicast messages.

There are three meaningful orderings for message delivery:

- First-in-First-out (FIFO)
- Causal
- Total
FIFO Ordering

FIFO ordering preserves the message order from each process.

Messages from different processes may be reordered, however.

Formally:
If a process $p$ sends $m$ followed by $m'$, then every correct process that delivers $m'$ must have already delivered $m$.

Remember that Chandy-Lamport snapshots required FIFO delivery.
Causal Ordering

Causal ordering preserves the causal relationship between messages.

This is like Lamport clocks [4] or vector clocks [5].

Formally:
If $\text{MSend}(m, G) \rightarrow \text{MSend}(m', G)$, then every correct process that delivers $m'$ must have already delivered $m$.

Causal ordering implies FIFO ordering.
Total Ordering

Total ordering preserves the order of all messages across all processes.

Formally:
If any correct process delivers \( m \) before \( m' \), then every correct process that delivers \( m' \) must have already delivered \( m \).

Total ordering does not imply causal ordering!
Observations on FIFO Ordering

Note that TCP connections preserve FIFO ordering.

This is only true for messages sent on the same connection.

Multicast messaging often uses UDP.

This is because TCP handshakes are expensive.

Similar techniques to reliable multicast or TCP sequence numbers can be used.

Note that this requires a receive buffer and queuing!
FIFO Sequence

$p_3$ queue:

$p_1$

$m_{1,1}$

$p_2$

$m_{1,1}$

$p_3$

$\langle 1, 0, 0 \rangle$

Time →
FIFO Sequence

Process $p_2$ can immediately deliver $m_{1,1}$ as it is in-order from $p_1$. 
FIFO Sequence

$p_3$ queue:

\begin{align*}
\langle 1, 0, 0 \rangle & \quad \langle 2, 0, 0 \rangle \\
\langle 1, 0, 0 \rangle & \quad \langle 2, 0, 0 \rangle
\end{align*}

Now

\begin{align*}
\langle 1, 0, 0 \rangle & \quad \langle 2, 0, 0 \rangle \\
\langle 0, 0, 0 \rangle & \quad \langle 2, 0, 0 \rangle
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
m_{1,1} & \quad m_{1,2} \\
m_{1,1} & \quad m_{1,2}
\end{align*}

Time →
FIFO Sequence

Process $p_3$ cannot deliver $m_{1,2}$ as it is waiting for $m_{1,1}$! It must queue $m_{1,2}$. 
Process $p_3$ can immediately deliver $m_{1,1}$.
Process $p_3$ can deliver the queued $m_{1,2}$. 
FIFO Sequence

Process $p_2$ can immediately deliver $m_{1,2}$. 

$p_3$ queue:

Now
Summary

- Distributed systems benefit from group communication
- Internet communication is mostly unicast
- Broadcast and multicast can be built from unicast
- Relatively simple protocols can achieve all-or-nothing delivery
- FIFO delivery requires only a TCP-like sequence number
Next Time …

- Causal and total ordered multicast
References

Required Readings


Optional Readings

References II


References III

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