OmicBrowse: a Flash-based high-performance graphics interface for genomic resources

Akihiro Matsushima, Norio Kobayashi, Yoshiki Mochizuki, Manabu Ishii, Shuji Kawaguchi, Takaho A. Endo, Ryo Umetsu, Yuko Makita and Tetsuro Toyoda*

Bioinformatics and Systems Engineering division (BASE), RIKEN (The Institute of Physical and Chemical Research), 1-7-22 Suehiro, Tsurumi, Yokohama, Kanagawa 230-0045, Japan

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ABSTRACT
OmicBrowse is a genome browser designed as a scalable system for maintaining numerous genome annotation datasets. It is an open source tool capable of regulating multiple user data access to each dataset to allow multiple users to have their own integrative view of both their unpublished and published datasets, so that the maintenance costs related to supplying each collaborator exclusively with their own private data are significantly reduced. OmicBrowse supports DAS1 imports and exports of annotations to Internet site servers worldwide. We also provide a data-download named OmicDownload server that interactively selects datasets and filters the data on the selected datasets. Our OmicBrowse server has been freely available at http://omicspace.riken.jp/ since its launch in 2003. The OmicBrowse source code is downloadable from http://sourceforge.net/projects/omicbrowse/.

INTRODUCTION
Omics research involves a comprehensive analysis of phenomes and various biomolecules including genomes, transcriptomes and proteomes. Experimental data are often analysed with reference to other annotation databases. A typical biological data record contains many kinds of attributes such as annotations, gene names, genomic positions, ontology terms, interactions, phenotypes and expression levels. In this article, we discuss our public OmicBrowse server hosted at http://omicspace.riken.jp/ with public data published by RIKEN and others, and details of the functionalities of OmicBrowse.

Furthermore OmicBrowse is a genome browser that integrates multiple heterogeneous databases into a single omic space (1). For this purpose, OmicBrowse can also be installed on a user’s PC to deploy users’ private and confidential datasets. An OmicBrowse server installed in a user’s PC works as a user’s private databases and achieves integration of both private and public datasets provided by different OmicBrowse servers. OmicBrowse allows a manager of a server to regulate accesses for each user to each dataset, and connections among multiple OmicBrowse servers securely integrate confidential datasets in multiple OmicBrowse servers. Mechanisms that manage private datasets on the user’s side achieve securely robust data integration that prevents loss and leakage of data, compared with other data integration services that simply allow the user’s datasets to be uploaded. In order to realize operation and data interoperability between OmicBrowse and other bioinformatics tools, OmicBrowse provides a standardized interface to exchange annotation data. We also provide a OmicDownload server that allows the user to download OmicBrowse datasets using an interactive graphical user interface.

DATA RESOURCE
In OmicBrowse, a database is a set of annotation data associated with each version of a genome. In order to host our OmicBrowse server, we have generated a list of databases for each genome version. The databases include not only RIKEN’s public databases such as FANTOM (2), RARGE (3) and tiling array data (4), but also the public databases published by other institutes such as NCBI (5), Ensembl (6), MGI (7), HGNC (8), TAIR (9), WormBase (10), RAP-DB (11) and RGD (12). The original dataset of each database has been converted into our original format including chromosomal interval. Table 1 shows the numbers of integrated databases computed for each species, genome version and omics data types. As of December 2008, 344 databases are integrated into our OmicBrowse servers for six species: Arabidopsis thaliana, Oryza sativa, Homo sapiens, Mus musculus, Rattus norvegicus and Caenorhabditis elegans.

*To whom correspondence should be addressed. Tel: +81-45-503-9610; Fax: +81-45-503-9553; Email: toyoda@base.riken.jp

The authors wish it to be known that, in their opinion, the first two authors should be regarded as joint First Authors.

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new version of a genome sequence is released by an original data site, a new set of databases related to a new genome sequence is generated and integrated into OmicBrowse. Furthermore, the databases are updated every 3 months.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

OmicBrowse is a web-oriented tool designed with a client-server model. The server-side program of OmicBrowse is implemented as a Java servlet, which retrieves a query against a set of databases related to a version of the genome stored in MySQL. The client and server communicate securely by exchanging XML documents, including a data request query and its response. On the client side, in order to present multiple databases located in an arbitrary range of chromosomal intervals in a graphical way, we have implemented a dataset viewer as an Adobe Flash component. Thanks to a capability of Flash, we have realized an OmicBrowse client including a dataset viewer with the following advantages. Since Flash can manipulate vector graphics controlled via a script language that does not depend on computational platforms, the OmicBrowse client realizes a high-speed graphical view of data records without image degradation against magnification of the image in the various computational environments on the client side. The OmicBrowse client can be launched in most conventional web browsers and as a stand-alone local program. These functionalities cannot be realized by employing other technologies, such as AJAX that have a high dependency on web browsers and operate at a slower speed.

**Integration of personal databases in a user’s PC and of public databases among multiple OmicBrowse servers**

As a communication function among multiple OmicBrowse servers, OmicBrowse provides a remote search function that can be integrated with a search result from the local server. More specifically, an OmicBrowse server imports a catalogue of datasets published by a remote server and performs a data search against both the local and the imported remote datasets simultaneously, displaying all the results to the client. Because OmicBrowse allows the user to set a remote access policy for each database and data exchange using a secure protocol, the user can set up a private server on a user’s PC, including his/her confidential datasets and browse them with public databases by other servers. The user can publish the datasets as a database by just changing their access control policy. For collaborative research among different laboratories, secure data integration and exchange via a peer-to-peer connection or a network of these groups are achieved. This functionality can be set up in the installation phase of OmicBrowse server described in http://omicspace.riken.jp/OmicBrowse/OmicBrowse Register.html.

**Presentational function**

The Flash component provides a high-performance graphical interface that allows a user to browse the integrated databases as shown in Figure 1. Each database is displayed as a horizontal line, and each data item of forward and reverse strands included in the database is displayed over and under the line, respectively. A set of databases selected by user is displayed as a vertically integrated set of lines. In another view, OmicBrowse is able to show a

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**Table 1.** The numbers of databases computed for each version of the genome

| Species | Genome version | Omics types | Other types | Total |
|---------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
|         |                | Genome | Transcriptome | Proteome | Phenome | SNP | Marker | Ontology | Homology | Others |       |
| At      | tair6          | 2      | 24           | 1        |        |     | 1     | 2        | 4       | 34     |
|         | tair7          | 2      | 1            | 1        |        |     | 1     | 2        | 6       | 13     |
|         | tair8          | 2      | 8            |          |        |     | 1     |          | 1       | 12     |
|         | MIPSv200307    | 2      | 10           | 1        |        |     | 2     |          |         | 15     |
| Os      | IRGSP build3   | 1      | 1            |          |        |     |       |          |         | 2      |
|         | IRGSP build4   | 1      | 1            |          |        |     |       |          |         | 2      |
| Hs      | NCB135         | 4      | 2            | 5        |        | 1   | 1     | 1        | 7       | 5      | 26    |
|         | NCB136         | 5      | 6            | 4        |        | 1   | 2     | 1        | 38      | 2      | 59    |
| Mm      | NCB1m34        | 2      | 4            | 5        | 2      | 1   | 1     |          | 8       | 1      | 24    |
|         | NCB1m36        | 6      | 7            | 4        | 2      | 1   | 3     | 1        | 34      | 1      | 59    |
|         | NCB1m37        | 6      | 2            | 4        |        |     |       |          | 3       |        | 15    |
| Rn      | RGSC3.4        | 4      | 2            | 4        | 2      | 3   | 1     |          |         |        | 16    |
| Ce      | WS116          | 1      | 6            | 1        |        |     |       |          |         |        | 9     |
|         | WS150          | 4      | 2            | 4        |        | 1   | 35    | 2        | 48      |        |       |
|         | WS190          | 4      | 2            | 4        |        |     |       |          |         |        | 10    |
| Total   |                | 46     | 72           | 43       | 7      | 4   | 16    | 11       | 123     | 22     | 344   |

As of December 2008, on our public OmicBrowse server the 344 databases of six species including *A. thaliana* (At), *O. sativa* (Os), *H. sapiens* (Hs), *M. musculus* (Mm), *R. norvegicus* (Rn) and *C. elegans* (Ce) are integrated. The set of databases includes not only databases of omics types namely genomes, transcriptomes, proteomes and phenomes, but also non-omic databases such as SNPs, markers, ontologies, homologies including syntenies, and others including literal and metabolic pathways. For detailed information about integrated databases, refer our OmicBrowse server URL http://omicspace.riken.jp/
whole genome allowing the display of other data from a simple collection of all chromosomes. This integrated view realizes the browsing of various omics datasets at once with an exon–intron structure as shown in Figure 1F. The annotation viewer (C) provides an integrated view of annotation data stored in the selected databases in (A) and located in the interval specified in the interval selector (D). The interval selector (D) allows a user to select an interval on the currently displayed chromosome. The length of interval specified in (D) is from 20 bp to whole chromosome. The control bar (E) provides icons respecting functions that control the annotation viewer (C), such as icons for launching the sequence viewer in text format, printing the current view, sending a URL indicating the current view via an e-mail to other users. The sequence viewer allows the user to download the data currently displayed in (C). The control bar also includes panel scrolling buttons indicated by arrowheads <, >, v and ^, and panel magnification buttons indicated by + and −. When the mouse cursor is located over the data item having an exon–intron structure, vertical lines that indicate the structure are displayed as (F) in order to compare other structured data located in the same genomic interval. On the annotation data display in the annotation viewer (C), a histogram is automatically generated when too many data are located in the interval to display, such as the RAFL ESTs database displayed in the second last line of this example. By clicking a histogram bar, the interval is set from the start address to the end address of that histogram bar. OmicBrowse supports numerical values mapped to the chromosomal axis. The last line of this example shows a dataset of tiling array in Arabidopsis and a result of the ARabidopsis Tiling Array-based Detection of Exons (ARTADE) (4) program which statistically predicts an exon–intron structure utilizing the dataset of the tiling array. The tiling array data are displayed as a bar chart in green and red that indicate whether the data are greater or lower than a threshold. The reference gene and predicted genes with the exon–intron structure are shown just outside of the bar chart. By selecting a gene, the stress intensity data of the tiling array of the gene is displayed in a pop-up window. A link to launch OmicDownload is displayed in the user’s menu (G).

OmicBrowse provides a URL that links to a view and sends it to the user’s mail program. It allows the view displayed in the OmicBrowse client to be shared with other researchers by sending them the URL and bookmarking it as the user’s personal record.

We provide another client named OmicDownload server, available at http://omicspace.riken.jp/gps/download, which implements an interactive graphical interface for data downloads shown in Figure 2. Since OmicDownload implements interactive procedures based on the data integration model of OmicBrowse, it allows a user to download annotation data selected by a keyword search and a chromosomal interval check as well as other data stored in various omic databases located in the chromosomal interval.

For other data presentation functions, refer to the OmicBrowse User Manual published at http://omicspace.riken.jp/tutorial/HowToUseOmicBrowse_Eng.pdf.
INTERFACES AMONG EXTERNAL SERVERS

An OmicBrowse server is deployed not only as a stand-alone server and a communication server among multiple OmicBrowse servers, but also a communication server among external servers. Supporting standardized interface OmicBrowse also supports an interface that realizes interoperability among existing systems. We have implemented Distributed Annotation System (DAS) 1.53E (13), which is a protocol for exchanging annotations on genomic or protein sequences, and enables the user to integrate data from multiple data sources. In the implementation, we have mapped a DAS data source to a web-based OmicBrowse database, so that every database can be accessed via DAS at http://omicspace.riken.jp/gps/das/dsn. As a result, OmicBrowse allows a user access through a DAS compliant program or via an arbitrary DAS client viewer such as Ensembl (6) and GBrowse (14) as well as OmicBrowse viewer and OmicDownload.

Solving an in silico positional cloning problem with PosMed

Since OmicBrowse enables us to select candidate genes from numerous genes existing within the wide genetic loci by filtering only those annotated with the user’s keyword, it can be applied to positional cloning problem solving. However, OmicBrowse only detects annotations with the user’s keyword in the filtering function. In order to solve this restriction, we have also implemented...
a web-based database system that possesses inference-type full-text search functions named Positional Medline (15,16), or PosMed for short.

At first, PosMed performs a full-text search of the document database such as MEDLINE abstracts using the user’s arbitrary keywords. Second, PosMed finds significant gene names or symbols that exist within the returned documents and generates a ranked list of these genes by applying statistical tests. This mechanism allows genes with a keyword within their annotations as well as with an indirect relevance to the keyword to be found. The user can call PosMed from OmicBrowse with a chromosomal interval specified in OmicBrowse, and the user can search genes located in the chromosomal interval by specifying a keyword. For each resultant gene, PosMed can call OmicBrowse to view data records of databases integrated in OmicBrowse located around the position of the gene.

Our PosMed server is available at http://omicspace.riken.jp/PosMed/.

APPLICATIONS

Our OmicBrowse public server in RIKEN has been used to analyse tiling array data in Arabidopsis with the ARTADE program for genome-wide suppression of aberrant mRNA-like non-coding RNAs (17), identification of the candidate genes regulated by RNA-directed DNA methylation (18) and transcriptome analysis in stress conditions (19). The OmicBrowse server has also been used to specify the genes responsible for ENU-mutant mice produced in a large-scale mutagenesis program in RIKEN (20) with PosMed, and over 65 responsible genes have been found so far.

COMPARISON WITH THE PREVIOUS VERSION OF OmicBrowse AND OTHER SIMILAR SYSTEMS

The advances over the previous version of OmicBrowse (21) are the following:

- Introduction of datasets for O. sativa and R. norvegicus.
- Deployment of DAS server service.
- Development of OmicDownload.
- Support for the latest version of Flash (version 10).

The advantages of the current version of OmicBrowse compared with other systems such as UCSC Genome Browser Database (22), Ensembl, Anno-J (http://www.annoj.org/) and GBrowse are as follows:

- OmicBrowse implements a securely robust data management mechanism by setting an access control policy for each dataset among multiple users for each dataset.
- OmicBrowse allows data to be viewed over a wider range of genomic intervals than other systems.
- Keyword filtering is implemented in OmicBrowse, but the other systems listed above do not support this.

One of the limitations of OmicBrowse including OmicDownload is in its data download functionality. In Ensemble, BioMart (23) is available and supports data searching by specifying detailed conditions specific to each dataset. However OmicDownload supports only a common condition applicable to various omic datasets.

CONCLUSIONS

We have discussed a genome browser named OmicBrowse, which provides an integrated view of omics datasets based on genomic coordinate axes. OmicBrowse employs a high-performance graphics interface implemented in Adobe Flash that assists effective genome-wide analysis with various data records stored in a multiple databases.

OmicBrowse also provides polished functionalities to support practical biological research activities such as secure integration of in-house private datasets and public datasets, providing a DAS access point as a standardized data access interface, and providing an interactive data download interface named OmicDownload.

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