

Instant Messaging (IM) 101

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Instant Messaging

- **Real-time online** communication between two or more people.
- More than one conversation at a time possible.
- IM programs began gaining wide popularity in the mid-1990s.



IM in Libraries

- Our users* are using it
 - Students, libraries, businesses, grandparents
 - 42% of all online users use IM (Pew Internet & American Life Project)
 - 90% of online teens use IM (AOL Instant Messaging Trends August 2004)
 - 250 million people worldwide use IM (AOL)
 - 7 billion messages daily (AOL)
 - By 2009 1.2 billion IM accounts are expected worldwide.

IM in Libraries



- Immediate
 - Real-time
 - Point of need
 - Interactive

Virtual Reference v. IM

- Advantages over Virtual Reference options (i.e.: Timpani and QuestionPoint)
 - Easy – few requirements
 - Free
 - Widely used outside the library world
 - “Lite” programs
 - Cell phone & video features
- Sacrificed features – Automatic data, co-browsing, and page pushing

Types of IM Services in Libraries

- Client
- Web-based – Chat widgets imbedded on library webpages
- Internal

Internal IM

- Enterprise Instant Messaging (EIM)
 - Lotus Sametime 1999
- GroupWise Instant Messaging – not accessible to individuals outside the network
- Communication between individuals in different geographic locations or offices
- Opportunity for practice

Popular IM Services

Yahoo! Messenger – For Windows and Mac systems (not all features available for Mac), off-line messaging, advertisement supported, and gaming and chat features

Google Talk – Talk and voice conversations, offline messages, mobile device compatibility

MSN Messenger – Microsoft, Common name for Windows Live, for Windows & Mac, and interoperability with Yahoo! IM

AIM – AOL, supported by advertisements, very popular, relatively "lite" software, and file sharing, now offers Linux service, privacy issues

Popular IM Services

Gaim - Multiplatform chat software, newer releases support a variety of operation systems, allows for nickname aliasing, tabbed message windows, encrypted messaging available through several plug-ins (OTR & NSS crypto library)

Trillian – Multiplatform chat software including Yahoo!, ICQ, AIM, and IRC

Meebo – Web-based platform service, uses Macromedia Flash, offers widgets, supports AIM, Yahoo!, MSN, ICQ, and Jabber

In depth comparison available at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_instant_messaging_clients.

Aggregators (Gaim, Meebo, Trillian)

- Reach more IM clients
- Reach more operating systems
- Only one download or website login

Considerations

- Staffing – added to a current workload or additional scheduling
- Security – files, sketchy links, individuals with questionable intent
- Dependability of service
- Staff training – etiquette and training
 - Traditionally casual nature and short messages
 - Appropriate use
 - Selecting a name
 - Lingo: <http://www.web-friend.com/help/lingo/chatslang.html>

Resources

Breeding, Marshal. "Instant Messaging: It's Not Just for Kids Anymore." Computers in Libraries 23.23 (2003): 38-40.

Forster, Shirley. "Using Instant Messaging for Online Reference Service." The Australian Library Journal 55.2 (2006): 147-158.

Steiner, Sarah, Elizabeth White, and David Free. We R Online, RU? Instant Messaging Reference Service at Your Library. Presented at GaCOMO 2006. 21 September 2006. Available at: <http://www.gpc.edu/~dfree/imcomo06/>.

Picture of the Commodore 64 computer courtesy of <http://erqonomenon.files.wordpress.com/2006/10/commodore64.JPG>.

Online status indicators used by St. Joseph Public Library <http://www.onlinestatus.org/>.