

Set up instant messaging

It's cheaper than the phone; faster than email. *by Russell Shaw*

If you can't speak to someone face-to-face, the telephone is the next-best thing. But phone calls—particularly long-distance calls—can be expensive. Email is a good alternative—if you don't mind one-sided, time-delayed correspondence. But there's a better solution: Instant messaging (IM, for short).

Instant messaging is real-time, written conversation conducted over the Internet. You type a message, click Send, and (if your correspondent is online), they receive your message in seconds. They type their reply, send it back, and you receive it in seconds.

In order to IM, you'll need to download and install one or more IM

programs, the best-known of which are ICQ, Yahoo Messenger, MSN Messenger, and—the most popular of them all—AOL's Instant Messenger program: AIM.

Unfortunately, IM networks don't exchange messages between networks. In other words, you can't use AIM to send an instant message to a friend who uses ICQ, MSN Messenger, or Yahoo Messenger.

We say "unfortunately," because there's no technical reason the services can't carry each other's message traffic—this is simply a turf war between Yahoo, Microsoft and America Online.

We've chosen AIM for this how-to article simply because it's the most popular chat program, but the

basics are the same for whatever IM software you decide to use. If most of your friends use a different program, use the same one they do.

AIM comes bundled with America Online's subscription service, but you don't have to subscribe to AOL to use AIM—it will work with whichever Internet Service Provider (ISP) you have. The software is free, and it's very easy to install.

INSTALL AIM

The first step in installing AIM is to download it. Point your browser to www.aim.com. Once you've arrived there, click on the button that says "Download Now." Contrary to expectations, this will not really initiate a download; it will take you to

CUSTOMIZING AIM The Easy Way

It's easy to customize AOL Instant Messenger to your liking.



1 Click on the Prefs menu (look for the wrench at the bottom of the box) to open AIM's Preferences window.



2 Customize AIM clicking on one of the categories in the left-hand column. If you don't wish to be contacted by strangers, for instance, set your privacy control so only those people on your Buddy List can reach you.



3 Add a little fun to your instant messages by adding Buddy icons that appear on your Buddy's AIM when you send them a message.

a new page, instead. If you've never installed AIM before, click on the button that says "New users click here."

This will take you to a new page, where you'll create your "screen name," which you'll use to identify yourself on the AIM network. AIM is a bit fussy when it comes to your screen name: It must consist of 3 to 16 letters or numbers; it must begin with a letter; and although it must be unique, it cannot contain any words or inferences that AOL deems objectionable.

In keeping with the informal nature of instant messaging, pick a fun screen name that your friends or colleagues will know recognize when they see it. If your name is Megan and you have a legendary fondness for mochas, for example, why not pick "MeganMocha?"

You'll also need to pick a password; but here, you absolutely *don't* want a word that's easily guessable. Don't use your spouse's, children's, or pet's names, for example. Dates, such as your birthday or anniversary are not good choices, either. On the other hand, you don't want to make your password so unique that you can't remember it.

Once you've provided this information, you'll finally be taken to the actual download page, where you can choose your computer platform (Windows or Macintosh). Click on your platform of choice, and the download process will begin. Once you've downloaded the software, you'll need to find it on your hard drive, double-click on the file, and install the software.

Once you've installed the software and signed on with your screen name, you'll be ready to set up your User Profile and Buddy List. The User Profile is a means for publishing information about yourself (your real name, your mailing address, and any particular interests you have), so that people—either friends or people with similar interests—can find you. This step is optional, so feel free to skip it (or edit it later).

Your Buddy List is where you'll add the names of those people with whom you communicate most frequently, with the caveats that they must also use AIM (or subscribe to AOL) and they should consent to being on your Buddy List.

Sending IMs to people who prefer not to communicate in this fashion is considered rude behavior. Observe IM etiquette and end an email to or speak to each person first.

Once you've set up your Buddy List, you can customize AIM to your liking (refer to the sidebar "Customizing AIM").

You're now ready to send your first message. Launch AIM (either from the Start menu or from the icon at the bottom of the screen), click the People pull-down menu in the AIM window, and select Send Instant Message.

The Instant Message box will display a menu with your Buddies' screen names. Highlight one or more names from that list, type your message, and click send. If they're online, you might see their reply in just a few seconds. Yes, it's that simple, and it's a whole lot faster than e-mail! ■

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c) Wanted easy to understand technology information
e) Only technology publication that served my needs
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- a) Yes
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3. If not, what other computer-related magazines have you purchased in the last 6 months (including subscriptions)?

- a) PC World
b) PC Magazine
c) Computer Shopper
d) Smart Computing
e) PC Upgrade
f) None
g) Other (please specify)

4. How many computers do you have at home?

- a) None
b) 1
c) 2
d) 3
e) 4 or more

5. How would you describe your knowledge of computers?

- a) Expert
b) Intermediate
c) Beginner

6. How do you access the Internet at home?

- a) Dial-Up
b) Broadband (DSL, Cable, Satellite, etc.)
c) I do not access the Internet at home

7. What technology areas do you want to learn more about? (Please check all that apply)

- a) Computers
b) Digital photography
c) Office software
d) Mobile computing
e) Home entertainment
f) Digital entertainment software
g) Upgrading

8. What do you use your home computer for? (Check all that apply)

- a) Communication (Email, Internet)
b) Productivity applications (Word, Excel, Quickbooks)
c) Play games
d) Digital photography
e) Music (download, create, burn CDs)
f) Watch DVDs
g) Digital video editing

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