25 Chatting and video conferencing

A IRC and web chat

IRC (Internet relay chat) is a system that allows Internet users to meet in channels (or chat rooms) in order to have live conversations on the topic of the chosen channel.

To participate you need to install a chat client, a special type of software, on your computer to connect to the chat server, the computer where the meeting takes place.

Once you have logged into an IRC server or a web chat site, you have to choose a username or nickname that will identify you during the chat.

After choosing the channel, you can read the conversations, type and send messages. You can post messages to everyone in the channel or have private conversations with someone.

Channels are run by channel operators, 'chanops' or just 'ops' who control the content and the people who join and may ban users or ask them to leave the room.

B Instant messaging

IM (instant messaging) programs allow Internet users to communicate in one-to-one conversations; they are a chat room for just two people.

With programs such as ICQ *(I seek you)* and MSN *Messenger* you can maintain a list of people, called a buddy list or contact list.

The program opens up a small window where the people engaged in the conversation type their messages.

The latest IM programs also incorporate telephone, video and file-sharing facilities and are becoming an alternative to traditional video conferencing programs.

ICQ screenshot

C Video and voice calls

Video conferencing (video call) systems allow a live connection between two or more participants in separate locations using the Internet to exchange audio and video data. The users need a computer with broadband access, a webcam, a microphone and speakers. Some popular programs are *CU-SeeMe* and *Windows Netmeeting*.

The Net can also be used for online telephone conversations, either computer-to-computer or computer-to-phone, which require special software (e.g. *Net2Phone*) or an applet, a Java application that runs from the browser when you access a web page, and also a microphone, sound card and speakers.

A video conference allows live visual and spoken communication

This type of communication uses VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), which turns analogue audio signals, like the ones on the telephone, into digital data that can be sent via the Internet.

D Virtual worlds

Internet users can also communicate in three-dimensional environments.

Instead of nicknames, people choose Avatars or 3D characters in order to interact with other people.

A popular language used to create interactive simulations within the Net is VRML (Virtual Reality Modelling Language).

Avatar image

6.1 Solve the clues and complete the puzzle with words from the opposite page.

1 One of the systems used for chat rooms.
2 The protocol needed for online phone conversations.
3 The language used to build virtual simulations.
4 Avatars are three .... characters.
5 Video calls transmit .... and video data.
6 Another word for channel operators.
7 You must install a chat .... on your computer.
8 The conversation takes place on a .... server.
9 A type of Java program whose name sounds like a fruit.
10 A synonym of a buddy list is a .... list.
11 Chats can also take place on the ....

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6.2 Complete the sentences below with words from the box.

buddy	video conferencing	nicknames
chat room	messaging	avatars

1 Always show respect for other people in a .... Never send any unpleasant or threatening email messages.
2 Most instant .... programs have what is called a .... list. Each user's screen shows a box with the .... of the people he/she chats with.
3 The company hopes to have virtual open-plan offices, where researchers from around the world can collaborate. Individuals would be represented by .... , personalized electronic figures with perhaps a name badge or a picture of the owner's face.
4 Fear of flying is producing a surge of interest in .... , in which business people meet face-to-face even though they are hundreds or thousands of miles apart.

You and computers

There are certain netiquette rules you should follow if you want to use chat rooms and other communication environments correctly. Next time you enter a chat room, keep them in mind.

THE TEN NETIQUETTE COMMANDMENTS

1 Be polite. You're speaking to a human being not to a machine.
2 Don't use CAPITAL LETTERS! This is considered as shouting.
3 Have a look at the tone of the conversation in the room before you take part. You may not like that channel.
4 Ignore those people who don't follow these rules.
5 Don't believe all the things people might tell you. Some people lie just for fun.
6 Don't give personal information (your real name, address, password, etc.).
7 Protect your computer. Use a firewall and antivirus programs.
8 Don't accept files from people you don't know. They might be or contain trojans.
9 In short, follow the same rules as in real life.
10 Enjoy your chat and have fun!