

Using MSN Live Messenger As an Auxiliary Tool of E-Learning

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Abstract

This paper investigates the use of MSN Live Messenger as a means for students to interact with facilitating instructors and staff to increase the efficiency of E-Learning.

Keywords: E-Learning, student-instructor interaction.

Introduction

Education The ultimate goal or achievement of education is that learning of the subject matters of the curriculum has been accomplished within the required time frame, according to the objectives and mission of the institution. An educational system traditionally comprise of a school, a curriculum, and a set of teachers. The inputs to the educational system are students, the subject matters of the curriculum are taught by the teachers in the classroom at the school. The quality of student output from the system varies extensively depending on many factors; quality of the curriculum, quality of the students, motivation and role of the students, quality of the teachers, motivation and role of the teachers, teacher-to-student relationships, student-to-student relationships, teacher-to-student interactivity, methods of teaching, learning feedback, learning environment, and more. That has been the educational system from its existence, a teacher-centered system, with the students as input and output. The place of learning, the pace of learning, and steps of learning are fixed, which in many cases are

not suitable or convenient to all students all the time.

Distance Education A solution to some of those problems was the offering of correspondence courses via postal mail, which extended the place of learning to homes, and student controlled pace of learning. Another solution is using the aid of computers offering "Computer Aided Instruction (CAI)" on a videotape, a VCD, a DVD, or other mass storage device, whereby students can at their own pace, and at home or office conduct their learning. But instead they have experienced other new problems, "it's a lonely way to study", and "no body to ask if something is unclear or do not understand something". Some countries with large rural area such as Australia and Canada offered distance education via radio communication, which solved only the place of learning problem, but still "a lonely way to study".

Many of the developing countries experienced other problems that effects the quality of student output, namely, not enough good quality teachers to go around the distant rural area schools. Using video conferencing technology to send one classroom teaching with a high quality teacher to other less fortunate schools was tried in several countries including Thailand, but was subject to very high operating costs of the communication medium, the dedicated leased line.

It is not only the formal education in schools that experienced the teaching and learning

problem, the business sector have also indicated that employee training is essential for their competitiveness and survival. Today's organizations will face two oncoming trends, the increasing age of the workforce and the increasing introduction of new technologies, and suggested that training is especially critical for business organizations, as the workplace introduces further new technologies, such as web-based operations, computerized intelligent systems, and other task technologies. In response to these changes of the fast-growing business, organizations are committed to provide training and development for their employees that enable individuals to use their talents and skills in ways that are both personally satisfying and of maximum value to the organization.

Education and training is poised to become one of the largest sectors on the world economy. It is therefore not surprising that as the education and training sector continues to grow it is increasingly subjected to pressures to change. Corporations are wrestling with the implications of these changes as technology increases the complexity of the work environment. As companies compete fiercely for highly skilled people, a Price Waterhouse Coopers survey indicates that 70 percent of large companies cited the lack of trained employees as a major barrier to growth. However, two thirds of traditional training costs are allotted to travel expenses to distance centers. Knowledge workers require flexible and continual learning rather than occasional, highly structured courses, that is, they require learning anywhere, anytime for anyone.

Training is the crucial strategies for organizations to assist employees to gain those necessary knowledge and skills needed to meet the challenges. It also plays a critical role in increasing workers' adaptability and flexibility which employers have found

becoming increasingly important. Thus, it is important for an organization to maintain necessary competences in its employees through adequate training.

E-Learning Stiles (2000), in his Keynote at the 2000 European Universities Information Systems Congress – EUNIS 2000, cited that, there is an increasing worldwide drive to use the technologies based around the World Wide Web (WWW) as a means of addressing a number of challenges which faces higher education, and WWW itself has bought about the prospect of a “global education marketplace” and with it the advent of non-traditional “corporate” higher education providers. He stressed that all governments should recognize the need for the great widened “mass” access to higher and further education and the need to equip national workforces with the initial grounding and “lifelong learning” skills which will be needed to provide the responsiveness and flexibility required for an ever-accelerating rate of change. And that the pattern of learning should be more “distributed”, and can take place “any time and any where”, but also encompass the activities of “on-campus learners” as well as “distance learners”. The researcher interprets it as referring to eLearning methodology.

Statement of the Problem

Elearning at Assumption University
Assumption University the pioneer of Information Technology education in Thailand and leader of Internet and E-Commerce curriculum in South-East Asia since 1999, began setting up an eLearning curriculum within a semi-autonomous College of Internet Distance Education in 2002. The first curriculum ready in 2004 was the Master of Science Program in Management, but could not operate the eLearning method of instruction because the Ministry of Education had not endorsed the curriculum's method of teaching online

through the Internet for a degree level education. Therefore, the already enrolled students studied the courses in classrooms, and continued in that context for another year. After Several Ministers of Education exchanged, finally in 2006, degree level eLearning method of education was allowed, and 100% eLearning method of instruction was administered from January 2006. (Charmonman 2007).

The courseware of the program was developed in collaboration with another business enterprise using their LMS software which was later code-named *AU Plus*. Learning through the use of *AU Plus*, the students access the virtual classroom via the Internet-based website, which presents the pre-recorded Webpages with the teacher's audio and video lecturing together with the instructional content. Should the student want to ask the teacher for some clarification of the teaching he will have to send his question via email to the teacher, to be answered within 24 hours.

As of April 2007, 367 students have enrolled into the Master of Science Program in Management, the first 4 batches with 222 students, 46 have graduated. The remaining 176 have all completed their course work and are still completing their Masters project, some have discontinued their studies due to their job difficulties. The Program commenced as a full 100% online eLearning curriculum from January 2006, starting with batch 5 students. The most recent 4 batches numbered 145 students are studying the 100% online eLearning curriculum.

Feedback from the students derived primarily from the phone-based call center recorded several problem areas. When a student did not understand something taught in the virtual classroom, he/she would access the message board of the system and place the question to the facilitating instructor

there. Or he/she can choose to send an email the facilitating instructor and wait for the answer for both options, which should be replied within 24-hours. There is no real-time interaction with the teacher, in many cases, the student cannot proceed until the question has been answered, and that has been the major problem confronting this eLearning stage.

The Author, a fulltime faculty member of Assumption University since 1999, worked as Associate Dean, then Dean of the Graduate School of Internet and E-Commerce for seven years. Then on the 1st October 2006, transferred to the College of Internet Distance Education assuming the position of Assistant Program Director, Master of science Program in Management, and became Program Director from the 1st July 2007 until the 1st March 2008, resigned from the University, but invited to rejoin as a Senior Lecturer. The above mentioned problem has fueled several searches including this paper to find a means to solve or ease the student to teacher interaction in eLearning.

MSN Live Messenger

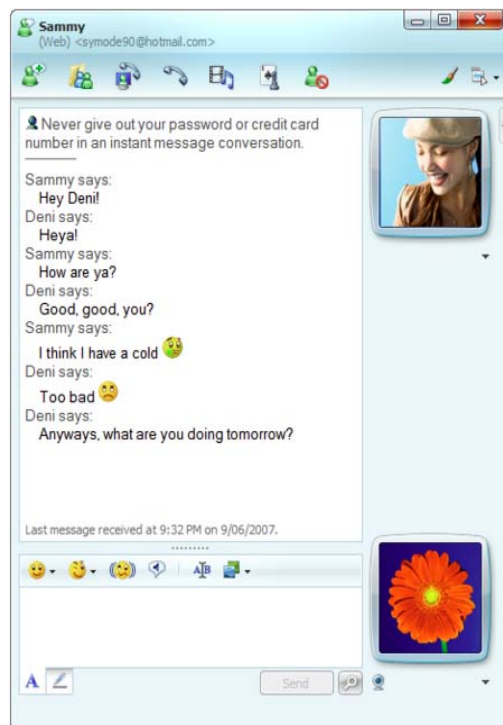
Before the product was renamed Windows Live Messenger, it was known as "MSN Messenger Service" from 1999 to 2001 and "MSN Messenger" from 2001 to 2005.

The first version of MSN Messenger Service, version 1.0 (1.0.0863), was released July 22, 1999. It included only basic features, such as plain text messaging and a simplistic contact list.

Microsoft released the first major update, version 2.0 (2.0.0083), on November 16, 1999. It included a rotating advertising banner and the ability to customize the appearance of the chat window. This version was followed the next year by version 3.0

(3.0.0080), which was released May 29, 2000. It included file transfers and PC-to-PC and PC-to-phone audio capabilities with [Net2Phone](#), one of the first [VOIP](#) providers. Along with the release of [Windows XP](#) came version 4.6 of MSN Messenger, on October 23, 2001. It included major changes to the user interface, the ability to group contacts, and support for voice conversations.

That strategy changed when version 5.0 of MSN Messenger was released on October 24, 2002. It was the first version that was allowed to be installed along with Windows Messenger on Windows XP. It included [UPnP](#) (Universal Plug and Play) based file transfers, minor changes to the [user interface](#) artwork, and a [Windows Media Player](#) interface plug-in. The next year, version 6.0 of MSN Messenger was released July 17, 2003. MSN Messenger 6.0 was a major overhaul of the whole platform, upgrading its simple text-based interface to include customizable elements such as emoticons, personalized avatars, and backgrounds. MSN Messenger received a major upgrade to version 7.0 on April 7, 2005. This version brought [wink](#) features that were previously only available in [three degrees](#). This version also advertised items to sell to you including [animated display pictures](#), [emoticons](#) and backgrounds. The contact list window style was also updated to match instant message windows. As part of Microsoft's [Windows Live](#) effort, which rebranded many existing MSN services and programs, MSN Messenger was renamed "Windows Live Messenger" beginning with version 8.0.

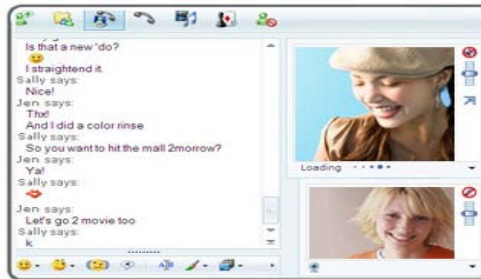


The final beta version, Beta 3, was released on May 2, 2006, was nearly identical to the final. Major changes and additions included new icons for the program, PC-to-phone calling, an updated look for the [Windows Live Call](#) window, a new default display picture, the Windows Live Today window, improvements to the grouping of sequential messages from each contact, [Rhapsody](#) integration in the U.S., and an option for sounds to be edited and/or turned off. The final and official release of Windows Live Messenger version 8.0 was on June 19, 2006. Although no notable changes were made between Beta 3 and the final version, the change from MSN Messenger to Windows Live Messenger brought some additional changes, such as, the status "On the phone" from the previous version was renamed to "In a call" due to the addition of [Windows Live Call](#), customization for the nicknames of individual contacts.

PC-to-PC Calling



Video Conference

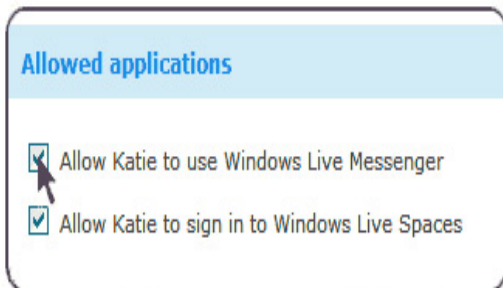


Sharing Folders

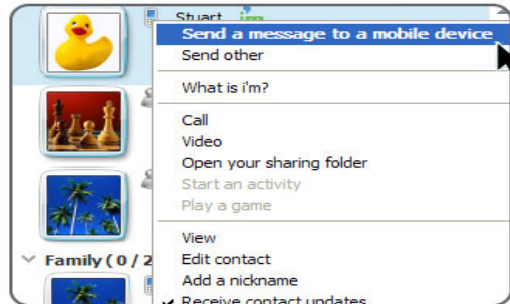


Features of MSN Live Messenger

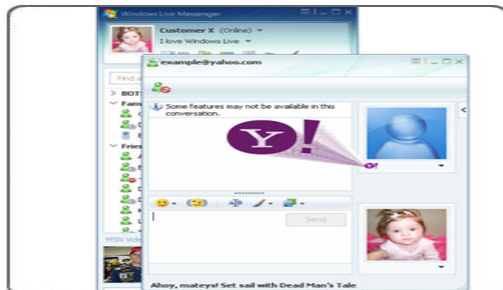
Safety Feature



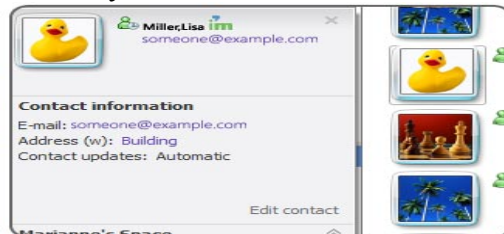
Text Messages to Phones



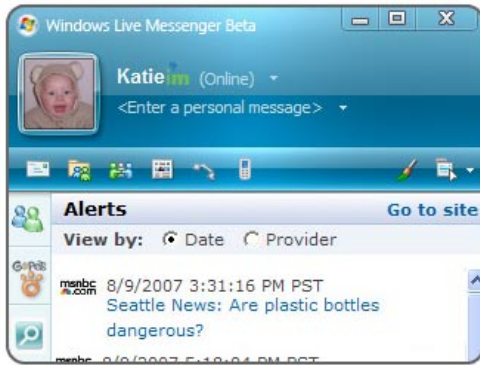
Interoperability with Yahoo Users



Two-Way Address Book



Windows Live Alerts



Applying MSN Live Messenger to E-Learning

1. Safety Feature
2. Yahoo Interoperability
3. PC-to-PC Calling
4. Video Conference
5. Sharing Folders or Files
6. Text Message to Phones
7. Two-Way Address Book

Test and Evaluation

1. MSN Live Messenger was installed and activated on the researcher's notebook computer and commenced preliminary test with faculty members, friends, and relatives.
2. The test started during the end of 2006 for three months. It was mainly for the get-to-know and functionality of the application.
3. The result showed that it can be a valuable component of the E-Learning course, mainly because of the ease of use, the video conference, the file sharing, the wide usage and, quite important, it's free.
4. Next step, from January to April 2007 was testing with students taking Master of Science in Management eLearning courses at Assumption University. Students taking MS 6504

or Operations Research are requested to install MSN Live Messenger and exchange *hotmail* or *yahoo* email address with the researcher.

5. They were instructed to use it as the primary means of communication for problems in that subject or requiring help from the teacher.
6. The students were also asked at the end of the semester their evaluation of having MSN aiding a subject to those not having MSN.
7. The result were all positive for MSN, that it help them get their problems solved faster and thereby study faster, and get better grade.
8. From then onwards, the researcher have used MSN as an auxiliary component in teaching of MS 6504 Operations Research subject, with very positive results.

Conclusion

The MSN Live Messenger is a valuable auxiliary tool of eLearning

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