IMVis: Instant Messenger Visualization

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ABSTRACT

Instant messengers have become a popular medium for providing awareness of others and supporting casual interaction. To smoothly move into and out of interaction, it is necessary to afford an awareness of who is around and if they are available. We have developed a peripheral visualization for an instant messenger designed to utilize people's natural cognitive abilities. Each contact is represented by pictures for each availability state (e.g. online, offline) or video snapshots embedded within a 3D environment using a space metaphor. Contacts that are more available—determined as a function of availability state and a viewer-settable interest level—are placed in the foreground and contacts less available are placed closer to a single vanishing point in distant space. The viewer is able to move contacts throughout the space to create a spatial mapping. Contacts that are of interest display conversation bubbles containing incoming messages.