



BBC WORLD SERVICE LEARNING ENGLISH

Instant Messaging



Instant Messaging: A New Way to Communicate

When you meet someone for the first time, do you ask their ASL? Do you LOL if they come out with something funny, and say 'CU L8er' when you finish the conversation? If you know what I'm talking about, then you are probably already a user of Instant Messaging, or IM.

The idea behind IM is simple. When you send someone an email, you don't know when you will get a reply. Your friend might not check their messages, or might not use that email address anymore. With IM, however, a program on your computer tells you when a friend is online. You can then send a message to your friend, who can type a reply instantly. To do this, you need an IM program, such as AIM, ICQ, MSN Messenger or Windows IM.

IM is already hugely popular in the USA, where people spend five times more time online than in Europe. However, IM is starting to take off in the UK, with over 3,000 people signing up to MSN Messenger alone every day. Worldwide, AIM, the IM service provided by AOL is by far the most popular. It has 195 million users who send about 1.6 billion messages every day. ICQ, which is owned by AOL, has about 140 million messengers, and MSN and Windows IM put together have about 75 million users.

The advantages of IM are obvious, but there is one very important disadvantage. You can only contact someone on the same network as you. If your friend is using AIM, and you are using MSN, you cannot talk to each other. This makes IM less useful than it should be. Imagine if you could not send an email from Hotmail to Yahoo. However, things look like they will change soon.

In general, the future looks bright for IM. Many programs also allow you to have voice conversations, have video conferencing – this means you can see the other person using a webcam – and also let you swap pictures, music and other files.

So, perhaps we'll all soon be asking someone's age, sex and location (ASL), and laughing out loud (LOL) when they say something funny. See you later! (CU L8er)

Glossary

come out with - here, say

program - computer software, application (note the American spelling)

online - connected to a computer network, in this case to an IM service

hugely popular - used by many people

take off - become popular

signing up to - becoming users of

owned by - if something is owned by someone, it belongs to them

obvious - evident, clear, easy to see and understand

the future looks bright - what will happen later is likely to be good

webcam - a camera which records moving images and sound and allows these to be transmitted over a computer network, e.g. the Internet, as they happen

swap - exchange

1. Reading Quiz 1

Are these sentences true or false? Circle the correct answer.

1. MSN Messenger is an e-mail program. True / False
2. People spend less time online in the USA than in Europe. True / False
3. ICQ is less popular than AIM. True / False
4. You have to use the same program to talk to your friends. True / False
5. You can exchange files with some IM services. True / False

2. Reading Quiz 2

Answer the following questions about the text.

1. What does an IM program on your computer tell you?

2. How many people are joining MSN Messenger every day?

3. How many messages are sent using AIM every day?

4. What is the disadvantage with IM?

5. What does 'LOL' mean?

3. Summary Completion

Complete the summary with words from the box.

bright	by	hugely	obvious	off
online	swap	up	with	

Instant Messaging, or IM, means using a program that tells you when a friend is 1. _____ so you can message them instantly, and they can reply.

IM is 2. _____ popular in the USA and is starting to take

3. _____ in the UK. 3,000 people are signing 4. _____

to MSN Messenger every day.

AIM and ICQ are the two most popular systems. They are both owned

5. _____ AOL. These two systems have almost 350 million users.

The good points of IM are 6. _____, but there is one disadvantage.

You can only communicate with someone who is using the same program.

However, the future looks 7. _____ for IM. Some systems let you have

voice conversations, see each other using webcams, and 8. _____

pictures and music.

IM also has its own language. You can use 'ASL' to find out how old someone

is, if they are a man or a woman, and where they are. You can use 'LOL',

meaning laugh out loud, if someone comes out 9. _____ something

funny, and 'CU L8er', for see you later, or goodbye.

4. Wordsearch



Try to find the words associated with COMPUTERS in the puzzle below.

There are ten words to find. Words can be written horizontally (g), vertically (i) or diagonally (m).

x	t	a	s	l	j	s	i	m	p	l	e
p	r	y	b	n	c	j	h	h	e	p	o
r	i	w	p	q	o	z	x	c	m	t	r
o	m	i	g	e	m	e	s	s	a	g	e
g	f	d	e	r	p	m	w	y	i	h	p
r	n	b	v	f	u	i	a	a	l	v	l
a	l	k	j	w	t	u	p	e	d	c	y
m	j	u	y	h	e	g	b	d	s	w	w
a	s	d	f	r	r	b	z	x	c	v	b
p	o	i	u	y	s	d	c	h	g	f	r
l	a	s	k	j	g	f	m	a	o	h	r
o	n	l	i	n	e	b	g	t	m	f	d

computers program	webcam online	message swap	email simple	reply type
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