Community Bar

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Abstract. The Community Bar is groupware supporting informal awareness and casual interaction for small social worlds: a group of people with a common purpose. Its conceptual design is primarily based on a comprehensive sociological theory called the Locales Framework (Fitzpatrick, 2003), with extra details supplied by the Focus/Nimbus model of awareness (Rodden, 1996). Design nuances are strongly influenced by observations and feedback supplied by a community who have been using both the Community Bar and its predecessor, the Notification Collage (Greenberg and Rounding, 2001), over the last five years. Community Bar's design supports how communities of ad-hoc and long-standing groups are built and sustained within multiple locales: places that offer a group the site and means for maintaining awareness of one another and for rapidly moving into interaction. This includes lightweight management of membership in multiple locales, as well as managing varying engagement with the people and the artefacts within them.

Community Bar Contributions

There are four novel aspects of Community Bar. Each is demonstrated in the video, and a very brief overview of the theoretical background is given below.

There are three main categories of distributed informal awareness and casual interaction systems: IM clients, which offer some awareness and transition to diad-based interaction; Chat rooms, which offer group interaction; and video media spaces, which provide rich awareness and diad-based interaction. Community Bar combines the strengths of each of these systems to offer rich group-based awareness and interaction.

Previous research (Whittaker et al, 1994) indicates that informal awareness and casual interactions involve small groups of varying lifetimes, both transitory and long standing. Community Bar supports both ad-hoc and longer-lived groups.

There is a tension between the desire for unobtrusive awareness information and the need to explore or to interact with richer forms of that information. Community Bar adopts some of the interface design decisions used in Microsoft's Sideshow system (Cadiz et al, 2002). Sideshow displays personal information feeds in a sidebar and provides "quick drill down" into information detail. Community Bar uses a similar sidebar display for group awareness information, and uses the "quick drill down" into information mechanism to support easy transitions into interaction.

Rodden's (1996) model of awareness uses the concepts of focus and nimbus to describe awareness. Focus is an individual's perception of information, and nimbus is the information that an individual provides about themselves. Community Bar provides controls for both focus and nimbus (nimbus is called "presence" in the video). These sliding controls allow people to express their varying involvement in groups and their varying interest in other people and artifacts. Using the focus/nimbus model moves away from the binary "in/out" or "on/off" room model present in most groupware and establishes a more fluid and dynamic model of relationships.

Video Content

The video contains a demonstration of the Community Bar system. The demonstration shows how Community Bar supports multiple public groups, ad-hoc groups, lightweight transitions from awareness to interaction, focus controls, and presence (nimbus) controls. The video concludes with an accelerated time capture of approximately one hour of typical use.

References

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