



ICQ

CS 377A Final Project

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Introduction

- New communication platform

Methods

We examined ICQ using:

- General user feedback
- In-depth user commentary
- A heuristic evaluation of the whole experience
- The organization of the interface's features.

ICQ

- Most popular instant messaging software
 - 87 million users (Wall St. Journal, Jan 15th, 2001)

ICQ Interface



Survey

- 17-question web-based, *anonymous* survey
- 24 respondents, mostly Stanford students
- Goals: Understand the core group of ICQ users - college students
 - Who are they? (demographics)
 - How and when? (usage patterns)
 - Feedback on specific features

Survey Findings: User quotes

- Why do people use ICQ?
 - “It’s convenient, and it’s relaxing chatting in real-time”
 - “Easy, non-demanding way to keep in touch”
 - “To keep in touch with friends”
 - “It is cheaper than talking on the phone”
 - “Because my friends are on it”
 - “Friends who use it rather than AIM”

Survey Findings: Demographics

- 54% are 19-23 yrs old, 46% are 24-28 yrs old
- 61% are male
- 46% from CS/Engineering
- All respondents use MS Windows
- Only one respondent uses a modem connection

Survey Findings: Usage patterns

- 63% of respondents have more than 2 years experience with ICQ
- 71% of respondents use ICQ everyday
- 63% use other IM software (AIM is most popular)
- Top ICQ mode: Online (33%), Away (21%)
- 33% have 17 or more contacts in contact list, but 88% have 10 or less active contacts at any one time
- 79% don't have an ICQ web page, 8% ask "What is an ICQ web page?"

Survey Findings: Usage patterns

- Most males use the latest ICQ 2000, but most females use the older versions (usability of download page?)
- Males tend to say they are experts more than females
- Experienced and frequent users tend to NOT advertise themselves as being “online” or “free for chat”




Survey Findings: Features

- Asked about 9 features
 - Message, file transfer, email, URL transfer, chat, ICQ phone, SMS messaging, ICQ greeting card, organizer features
- Feature awareness:
 - Many users seemed unsure about whether their version of ICQ has the more fancy features.
 - They chose “never used this feature before” over “don’t know what this feature is” although their ICQ don’t have the feature

Survey Findings: Features

- Most frequently used feature: sending messages (of course)
- Least frequently used feature: ICQ greeting card
- Overall, all features have favorable likeability ratings, although some people really hate the chat and ICQ phone features

Observational Method

- Observed 8 first-time or early ICQ users
- Tested 4 modes of functionality
 - Sound on/off  
 - Simple/Advanced 
- Tested 6 functions
 - Send and receive message
 - Receive and open file
 - Receive and open URL
- Conclusions

Predictive Evaluation

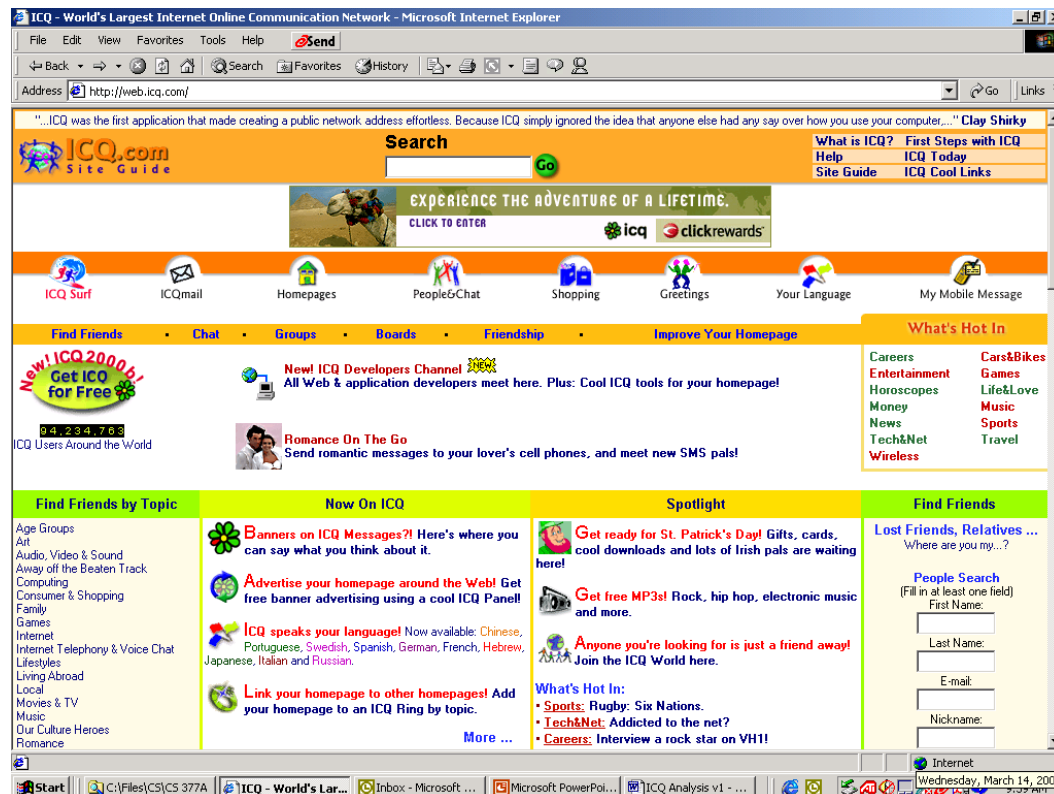
- Goal
 - Expert review of whole experience
- Methodology
 - Analysis of getting and using the application

Getting ICQ: Conclusions

- Hard to find and download
- Not follow heuristics
 - Simple and Natural Dialogue
 - Speak the User's Language
 - Minimize User Memory Load

Getting ICQ: Examples

- ICQ homepage confusing



Getting ICQ: Examples

- Download instructions cryptic
- Aimed at repeat, not first time, user

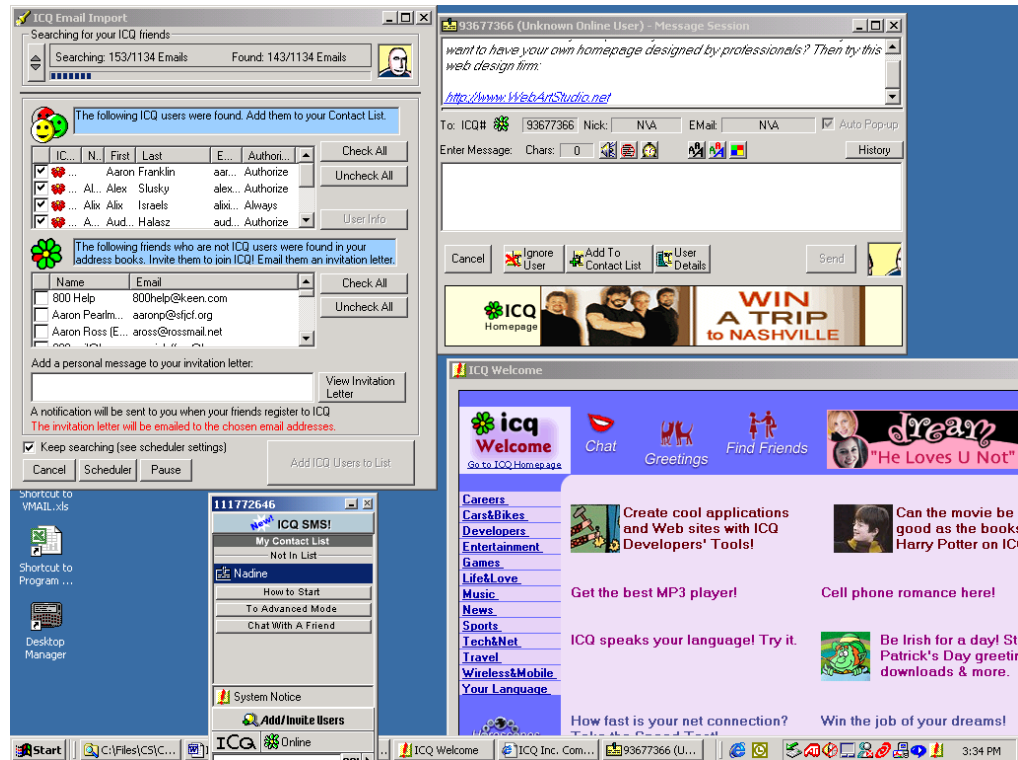
[Downloading ICQ 2000b Beta v4.63 Build #3279](#)

Using ICQ: Conclusions

- Hard to launch and use “out-of-the-box”
 - “Spam” is first and continued experience
- Help is not part of standard product
- Not follow heuristics
 - Feedback
 - Prevent errors
 - Help and documentation
 - Consistency

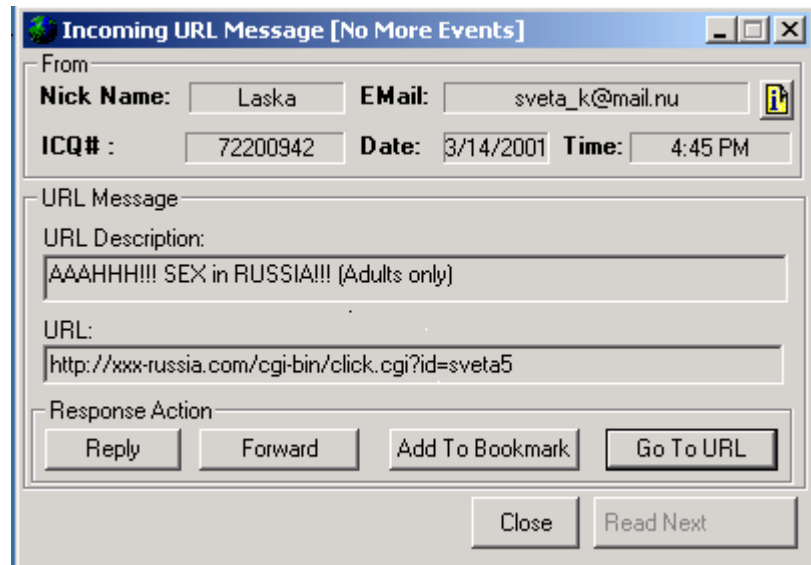
Using ICQ: Examples

- First time user experience: confusing array of options



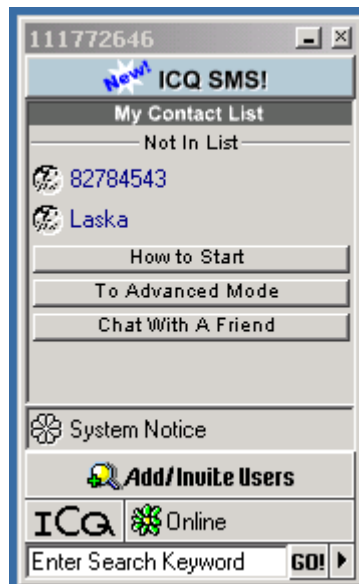
Using ICQ: Examples

- Repeat experience: Starting application
 - Expected: Window to find and message
 - Got: Spam message
 - How delete? Close?...



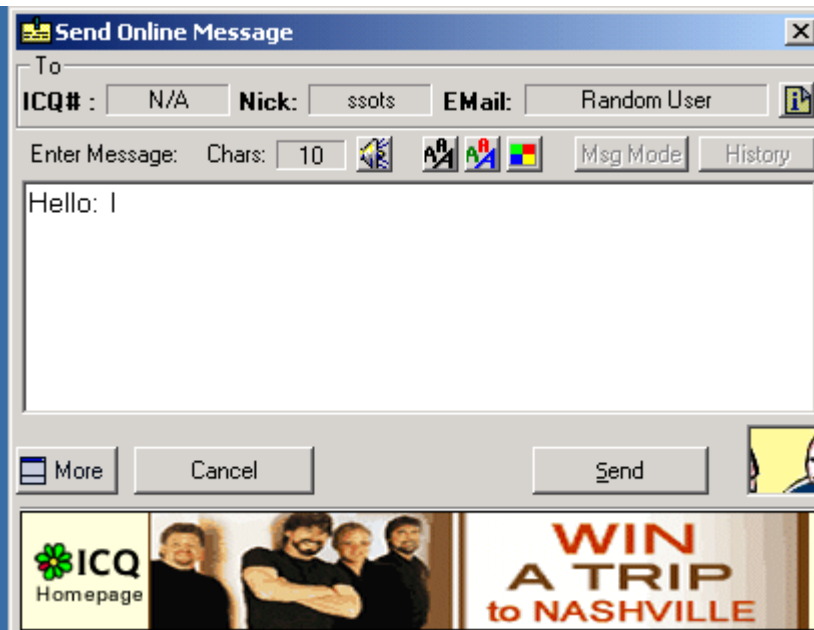
Using ICQ: Interface

- Console
 - Shortcuts (good) and for advanced users



Using ICQ: Interface

- Message window
 - Clutter (why character count?)
 - Non-existent error messages (when click More, for instance)



Predictive Evaluation conclusions

- Experience aimed at hobbyists... not 1st time users
- Application compelling once you “get it”
 - ICQ not help you “get it” since not follow basic usability heuristics

CARDSORT

Question: Is the ICQ interface organized intuitively ?

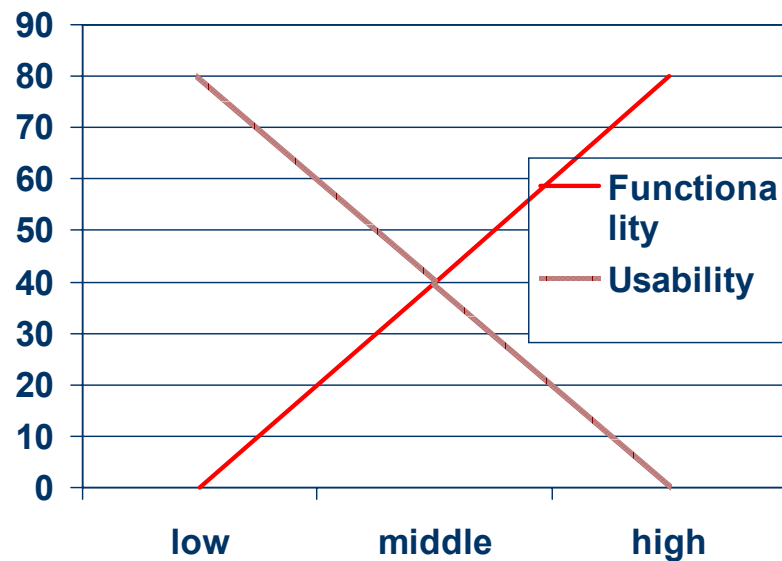
Yes?

No?



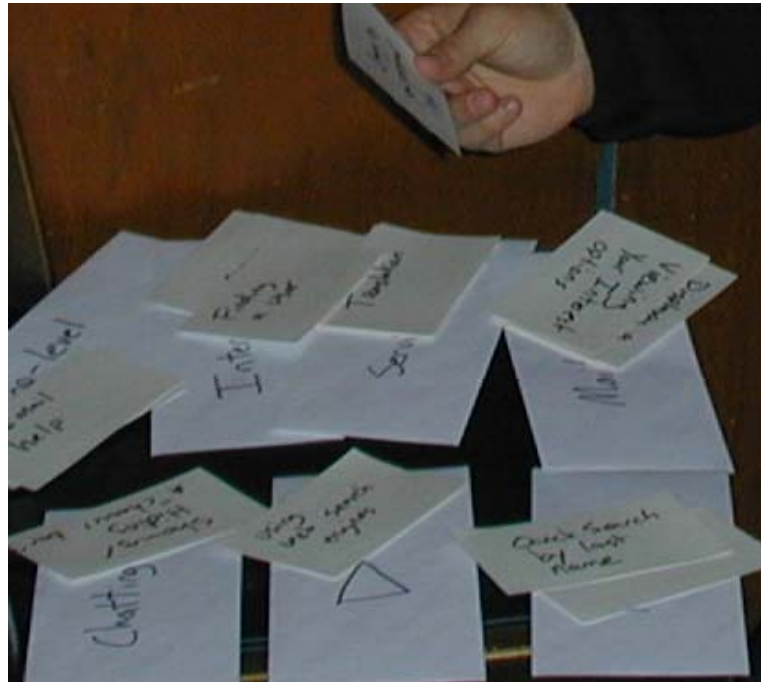
INTERFACE PROBLEM

- Lots of functionality
- Confusing?



CARDSORT: METHOD

- 42 Cards – 1:1 mapping between functionality, card
- 7 Categories



CARDSORT : METHODOLOGY, PT. 2

- Subjects familiar with IM'ing, but not ICQ
- Asked to discern which categories the feature belonged in and place the cards in appropriate categories



METHODOLOGY PT 3: PROBLEMS

- Rigid number of categories – does this force the subject to misplace a feature?
- Lots of features – do subjects become less sincere as they become bored?
- Difficulty in deriving meaningful quantitative data from this method: the largest problem is determining a metric to distinguish the cards from each other...

CARDSORT – RESULT CODING

	Subject 1	Subject 2
Feature 1	X		
Feature 2			
Feature 3	X	X	
Feature 4	X		
Feature 5		X	
....			

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

Problem	Recommendation
Help Section – misclassified by <i>100%</i> of the subjects	Help section is currently nested 2-deep; every subject classified it as a “top-level” feature. Simple solution: Move to the top.
High variance of categorization of the elements belonging to the category denoted by an arrow	The affordance of the arrow button isn’t clear; label category in a manner more closely mapped to its function.

Group Conclusions

- Arrange elements in a more intuitive manner
- Focus on first-time user experience in total
- Speak the user's language [Downloading ICQ 2000b Beta v4.63 Build #3279"\)](#)
- Match sounds and icons to actual function