

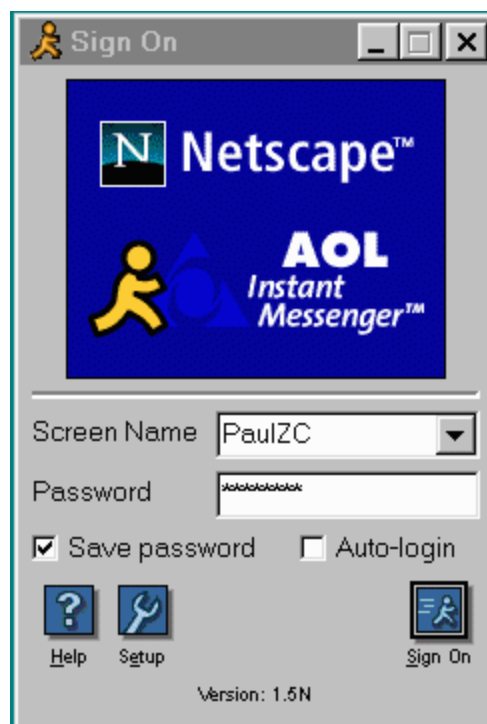


AOL Instant Messenger

by Gary Wolff

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A couple of months ago I was introduced to a cool online chat service, the AOL Instant Messenger, by my know-it-all, early adopter, world traveler, children's entertainer friend, Mr. Ken Cotton. If, like me, you don't have a strong enough computer to handle internet telephony, AIM is the way to go for a live, real-time chat. I have used other chat programs and found most of them are a bit troublesome to use, especially for non-hacker novice-types like myself who often have trouble ascending software learning curves.



AIM is simple to install and use and enables you to communicate on-line with your other "buddies" whenever they happen to be online at the same time as you. Once you know your buddy's screen name, you can add it to your "buddies list," and with door-opening sounds and door-closing sounds you program in your settings, you will always know when your buddies sign on or off. By using auto-login, you are connected automatically everytime you access the Internet. And one of the neatest parts of this service is that you don't have to be an AOL subscriber to use it. I routinely chat online with a friend in California and we've both saved a ton of money on long distance charges.

One more cool feature to comment on is, if you're online, but not at your computer (e.g. downloading software, a time-consuming process for those of us still traveling at 28.8 kbs - I just usually go take a bath), you can type in a short message to auto-respond to any of your buddies who try contacting you while you are unavailable.

One piece of advice. Getting your onscreen name can be a real pain, if you try to get anything remotely close to your own name, as there are perhaps millions of folks already using the service. If at first, despite your most creative efforts, you can't get anything close to your desired name using letter characters, try using numbers. I wound up using my birthdate and my screen name was approved immediately. To find other people's screen names who are using the service, you can do an AOL search by email address.

The URL for the AIM software is: <http://www.aol.com/aim>

Also, there's an icon for AIM on the task bar of the Netscape Communicator browser.

Good luck, happy chatting, and hope to see you online. garywolf@gol.com
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