Instant Messaging
New Trends in Library Usage

Sarah Steiner, Georgia State University
Basics

- IM chat allows you to exchange typed messages in real time with one or many patrons/coworkers.

- Some platforms allow the user to exchange messages with you without an account, others require that they establish one before they can speak to you.
Who’s Using It?

• 42% of online individuals use IM (Pew)

• 90% of online teens use IM (AOL)

• 29% of online individuals use IM more than email (AOL)
In the beginning…

- We had Telnet and IRC (1970s)
- Then ICQ (mid 1990s)
- AOL’s AIM (1997)
- Then OCLC made a more robust chat system intended exclusively for libraries: QuestionPoint.
Library Chat Progression

• QuestionPoint and other similar programs (LSSI, 24/7) were more glitch-prone than their simpler IM counterparts, but provided the ability:
  – to co-browse
  – to push pages
  – to maintain statistics easily
  – to orchestrate group staffing amongst many libraries
The Renaissance of Simple IM

• In the past seven years many libraries have been moving back to the more simple (and much cheaper) interfaces presented by non-library chat providers.

  – AIM, MSN, Yahoo!, Jabber, Gtalk
  – LiveHelp, CuteChat, Xigla, Volusion, BoldChat
They May Seem Inferior, But Are They?

- Hosting (internal or external)
- Security (vastly improved)
- Training Time (slim to none)
- Cost (slim to none)
Neat New Stuff

- Aggregation
- Widgets
- Mobile Instant Messaging (via cell phone)
Aggregation

- Allows you to monitor several IM accounts through a single interface.
- Examples: Pidgin, Trillian, KoolIM, Meebo

- GSU Library uses Pidgin to monitor AIM, MSN, and Yahoo! Accounts.
Widgets

• Basically, widgets allow you to embed a chat box into your existing Web site. Users who visit your site will then be able to chat with you.

• To try: Plugoo and Meebo’s widgets

• **The Problem:** this is a new technology, so there are still some minor glitches
Sarah Steiner

Who Am I?

As one of the Learning Commons Librarians, I'm here to help GSU's undergraduates through the process of college-level research and study. My responsibilities include the maintenance of the General Research Guide and the Learning Commons blog, and the coordination of our virtual reference services.

What Can I Do For You?

- Provide research assistance in-person, by email, or by telephone.
- Tell you more about our virtual research options, including instant message and Facebook reference.
- Provide assistance regarding the contents of the General Research Guide.
- Acquaint you with the new Learning Commons space.

Please contact me at ssteiner@gsu.edu or 404.413.2808.
Mobile Instant Messaging

- Almost everyone has a cell phone, and almost all cell phones come with a pre-installed IM client.
- Also, text messaging (SMS)

- **The Problem:** small phone keypads/viewscreens can make it difficult to answer more than very simple questions.
Cost

• Almost all of these technologies are totally free, so testing them with your user base is low-risk.
Questions?
Works Cited

