(51) International Patent Classification[7]: **G06F 17/00**

(21) International Application Number: PCT/US00/25765

(22) International Filing Date:
21 September 2000 (21.09.2000)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
09/404,757 24 September 1999 (24.09.1999) US

(63) Related by continuation (CON) or continuation-in-part (CIP) to earlier application:
US 09/404,757 (CON)
Filed on 24 September 1999 (24.09.1999)

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(81) Designated States *(national)*: AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW.

(84) Designated States *(regional)*: ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:
— *Without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report.*

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) Title: MESSAGING APPLICATION USER INTERFACE

(57) Abstract: A messaging application user interface has an input element for receiving electronic messages and an output element for displaying electronic messages. The messaging application user interface can be implemented so as to maintain a subset of the plurality of potential message recipients, the subset being determined using a predetermined criterion. The messaging application user interface also can be implemented so as to auto-complete a partially entered address based on the subset of potential message recipients. A set of user-selectable signals that modify auto-completion behavior also can be used with the messaging application user interface. The messaging application user interface can be used in an instant messaging system to allow a user to send instant messages to and exchange comments with a plurality of other users without having to switch among several instant message windows.

WO 01/24036 A2

MESSAGING APPLICATION USER INTERFACE

5   Technical Field

This application relates to a messaging application
(e.g., e-mail, instant messaging, chat rooms, etc.) user
interface.

                                  Background

10   The computer system 100 illustrated in FIG. 1
represents a typical hardware setup for executing software
that allows a user to perform tasks such as communicating
with other computer users, accessing various computer
resources, and viewing, creating, or otherwise manipulating

15   electronic content -- that is, any combination of text,
images, movies, music or other sounds, animations, 3D virtual
worlds, and links to other objects. The system includes
various input/output (I/O) devices (mouse 103, keyboard 105,
display 107) and a general purpose computer 100 having a

20   central processor unit (CPU) 121, an I/O unit 117 and a
memory 109 that stores data and various programs such as an
operating system 111, and one or more application programs
113. The computer system 100 also typically includes some
sort of communications card or device 123 (e.g., a modem or

25   network adapter) for exchanging data with a network 127 via a
communications link 125 (e.g., a telephone line).

            As shown in FIG. 2, a user of a computer system can
access electronic content or other resources either stored
locally at the user's own client system 202 (for example, a

30   personal or laptop computer) or remotely at one or more
server systems 200. An example of a server system is a host
computer that provides subscribers with online computer
services such as e-mail, e-commerce, instant messaging, chat
rooms, Internet access, online games, electronic newspapers

35   and magazines, etc. Users of a host computer's online
services typically communicate with one or more central

server systems 200 through client software executing on their
respective client systems 202.

       In practice, a server system 200 typically will not be
a single monolithic entity but rather will be a network of
5 interconnected server computers, possibly physically
dispersed from each other, each dedicated to its own set of
duties and/or to a particular geographical region. In such a
case, the individual servers are interconnected by a network
of communication links, in a known fashion. One such server
10 system is "America Online 4.0" from America Online,
Incorporated of Virginia.

       One increasingly popular computer network-based
activity is referred to as "instant messaging." An instant
message is a form of electronic communication between users
15 of a computer network in which a window pops-up on the
recipient's computer screen "instantly" and without the
recipient having to access an e-mail program or otherwise
check for messages. An instant message appears essentially
as soon as the message sender clicks the send button subject
20 to any time or propagation delays the message may have
encountered on the network. In comparison to most e-mail
applications, instant messaging enables users to communicate
with each other in a more dynamic, urgent and interactive
manner.

25   FIG. 3 is a screen shot of an Instant Message (IM)
window 130 as used in AOL's Instant Messenger ("AIM") system.
As shown therein, the window 130 includes a text display
area 131 and text entry area 132. Both users involved in the
IM under consideration (i.e., sender and recipient) would
30 have a similar window displayed on his or her computer
monitor. When one user (PhillipsJC) types a comment 134 in
text entry area 132 and clicks the Send button 133 (or,
depending on the configuration, presses the "ENTER" key on

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the keyboard), the entered text (e.g., "Hey, did you see the game last night?") is displayed in the text display area 131 of the window 130 such that it is visible to both users. After FRsnafu enters a comment 135 in response and clicks the

5   Send button 133, that comment 135 appears in the text display area 131 underneath the previous comment 134. This exchange of comments continues indefinitely until the users decide to terminate the exchange.

         Typically, instant messages can be sent to another

10   user only when that user is presently signed on to the computer service. Users who are signed off are unavailable to receive instant messages. Accordingly, another popular innovation introduced by America Online is the "Buddy List," which allows users to monitor when other specified users

15   ("buddies") are signed onto and/or off of the computer service under consideration (e.g., AOL Instant Messenger).

         As shown in FIG. 4, the Buddy List is implemented as a window 140 that lists specified users, or buddies, who are signed on to the AIM system. In the example shown, the Buddy

20   List for user "PhillipsJC" indicates that four of PhillipsJC's buddies 141-144 currently are signed on to the system and thus available to receive instant messages. The Buddy List is updated based on information received from a server to add or delete names of buddies as they sign on and

25   off, respectively. Such Buddy List updates can be accompanied by various audible and visual indications to help notify the user that a buddy has signed on or off.

         Users may send instant messages to, and exchange comments with, more than one other user at a time.

30   Conventional instant message client software typically creates a separate instant message window for each user that is sent an instant message. For example, as shown in FIG. 5, if a user sends three instant messages to three other users,

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one to each of the users, three separate instant message windows 130a, 130b, and 130c are created. To change from one instant message window to another, the user typically must move and/or press a button on the mouse, or press a sequence
5   of keys on the keyboard, to activate the desired instant message window.

        The present inventors recognized that some users may find it undesirable to have to switch between instant message windows in order to send instant messages to and exchange
10 comments with more than one other user at a time. Therefore, the present inventors recognized that it would be desirable to provide users with a user interface through which a user can send messages to and exchange comments with one or more users without having to switch among several different
15 windows.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

        Implementations may include one or more of the following features. In one aspect, a computer-implemented
20 method of addressing a message to a member of a plurality of potential message recipients may include maintaining a subset of a plurality of potential message recipients. Each potential message recipient may have an associated address, and the subset may be determined using a predetermined
25 criterion. The method also may include auto-completing a partially entered address based on the subset of potential message recipients.

        In another aspect, a method of addressing electronic messages to users of a computer network may include providing
30 a set of user-selectable signals that modify auto-completion behavior and auto-completing a partially entered address for a message based on entry of one or more of the set of signals.

<div align="center">- 4 -</div>

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