

PRESENCE TECHNOLOGY EXPLAINED

Introduction

It is a competitive advantage to be able to communicate quickly and efficiently in today's business world. With the increasingly busy schedules and diverse locations of workers, however, it can be hard to get in touch with the right people at the right time. From playing phone tag with key contacts to interruptions during important meetings, delays can add up to considerable lost time every year.

When people understand how to best contact each other, they are able to focus on getting the information they need rather than wasting time. This is the core benefit of "presence," knowing instantly whether someone is available to communicate and how.

Presence has been built into a number of contexts and devices, from instant messaging to Microsoft Office documents and portals, mobile devices, e-mail and telephone systems. Presence lets teams work efficiently whether individual members are at the office, traveling on business, working at home or even en route to another location. With presence, you can connect people, information and processes in real-time, enabling workers to communicate and make better decisions faster.

What is Presence?

Presence is the ability of a person or device to communicate with others and to display levels of availability. Presence awareness, a closely related concept, is the knowledge of

Case In Point

Companies can immediately streamline their processes by incorporating presence in scenarios such as these:

- Facilitate remote collaboration: Someone working at home or on the road can work with colleagues in the office through a presence-enabled intranet portal, thereby seeing who is online at any moment of the day
- Automate processes: Companies can link data from a customer relationship management (CRM) system, automatically adding IM contacts as new customers are added to the system
- Increased success rate of communications: Call center personnel can talk to each other using instant messaging while live on the telephone with a customer needing answers

the person or device's presence. For example, if you reach your colleague's voice mail, you know the person is not answering their phone, but you do not yet know everything you need to reach them. In fact, they might be sitting near their phone engrossed in another task or out in the field available via cell phone. . If the person could share their level of

availability, you would instantly know whether it was appropriate to interrupt them.

With real-time communication, presence is clearly displayed such as "Online," "Busy" or "On the Phone". Using this method of communication, your colleague can convey his or her preferred method of communication through a status indicator. When you see the status change to "online," you know you can then reach your colleague instantly with a quick text message. This valuable type of intelligence can even be extended to determine the presence and availability of devices such as telephones too.

Presence has measurable value in the workplace. Setting up calls and meetings still takes up too much time. Workflow is blocked by the inevitable physical separation of team members. Between email, instant messaging, desk, home or cellular phones, PDAs and the Internet, information workers are connected to a communication device most of the time. Presence allows people to see who's available and immediately contact them, thereby increasing the likelihood that the intended communication will yield positive results.

Integrated Presence

Presence awareness is becoming a natural part of doing business. There is an increasing trend toward embedding presence within software applications, enabling everything from automatic alerts and notifications to database queries through an instant-messaging interface.

Table 1: Microsoft Products with Built-In Presence

Goal	Application
Instant Messaging	Microsoft® Windows Messenger
	Microsoft® Network (MSN) Messenger
Collaboration	Microsoft® Office SharePoint Portal Server
	Microsoft® Windows SharePoint Services
Communication	Microsoft® Outlook
	Microsoft® Office Live Communications Server
Productivity	Microsoft® Excel
	Microsoft® Word

Communication Tools

Customers will find presence awareness already built into Microsoft® Outlook. Connecting with colleagues is as easy as hovering over a presence icon (see Figure1), where you can see if someone is online or busy.

Additionally, the business telephone system plays a role in presence as the device that will complete voice communications. The phone system delivers information as to who's calling and with voice recognition, why they are calling. Based upon pre-determined rules, the call can be handled accordingly

Example: The boss calls and Bill takes the call immediately. His mother-in-law calls and she's sent directly to voice mail.

Find Me/Follow Me

The voice communications aspect of presences extends outside of the office. Incoming callers can call one number and the presence-equipped system will traverse a list of telephone numbers until it successfully locates the called party.

Summary

Rather than slowing work processes and decision-making by trying to contact others when they are unavailable or busy, organizations can improve their efficiency and make faster, better decisions by using the power of presence. When presence information appears in the applications most often used by information workers, it reduces the time needed to answer questions and complete business projects. The ability to understand the preferred communication method of one's colleagues allows people to collaborate regardless of time zone, location or device. Today, real-time knowledge is dramatically increasing productivity and effectiveness for companies around the world.