

Executive Summary

IIM – Internationalized Instant Messaging

Synopsis

Instant Messaging (IM) technology allows synchronized communication between geographically dispersed users. Its growth rate is faster than that of e-mail or the browser, and it is beginning to offer application sharing, wireless services, automated alerts, and even support for other types of data transmission such as audio and video.

As its user base increases tremendously, users from more and farther away regions of the world are participating using widespread client applications such as AIM, MSN, Yahoo Messenger and ICQ. Many of these existing millions of users are workers and decision-makers at corporate level.

Successful interaction of users in current IM systems requires the compromise on a common language shared between participants in a conversation.

Our proposal consists of a novel service based on IM, one that introduces an external translation service mediating participants' messages.

Such an Internationalization-aware IM service (IIM) allows geographically dispersed users who speak different languages to interact in their mother tongue. It is particularly suited to global organizations developing strategies to manage cross-cultural communication. The IIM service proposed brings compelling benefits and added value to such global businesses in the form of an affordable, language-agnostic communication medium.

Competition 2005

Who is your proposed customer?

Our main target markets are:

- Global corporations/organizations with offices scattered around the world.
- Governmental agencies that provide cross-cultural services such as Foreign Office/Emigration departments.
- Global Humanitarian organizations, such as the Red Cross, that need to synchronize their aid operations on a timely fashion and across many countries and languages.
- Education institutions with large numbers of foreign applications.
- On-line multi-player games where players chat in "real-time" with each other.

Basically, we aim to provide low-cost, efficient and improved computer-mediated-communication (CMC) for global teams and individuals that communicate separated by space, time and language -being language a strong boundary condition for all interpersonal communication.

What is that customer's problem or pain that your offering would resolve?

Current IM systems, as all CMC, are highly constrained by the language barrier. If communication is to occur, peers have to agree upon and communicate in a shared language that is common to all. Hence, currently there is an impossibility to communicate in a native language when having conversations with fellow, foreign-speaking peers and colleagues.

Because of the language barrier:

- IM users in cannot conveniently interact in their mother tongue when interacting with native speakers of other languages.
- IM users in businesses and organizations with offices/branches spread over different countries have to communicate using a common language, regardless of the language(s) used in their other offices located in different countries.
- Users who either cannot, or would rather not, engage in CMC in any language other than their own native one are excluded.

To minimize the language barrier global businesses and organizations employ specialized, dedicated, costly multi-lingual staff, and use expensive alternative means of communication.

What is your solution and why is it demonstrably better than current solutions to the customer problem you have identified? In other words what competitive advantage do you bring to the party?

Our solution consists of our proprietary IIM system making use of a separate, brokered translation service that translates messages between participants according to their specified language preferences. It offers users the possibility to interact in their native tongue, regardless of the native language used by the other participants in the conversation.

Our proposal considers the following research results:

- Frequent IM'ers have long, fast-paced interactions, which are ideal for current translation systems and for our business model.
- The terseness and directness of the IM medium is useful for asking questions of colleagues, scheduling meetings and appointments, and coordinating with family members or work fellows. These characteristics make it suitable for the corporate market.
- IM is an interactive "real-time" communication operation where the parties involved can refine the context of messages, just by trying again with different words or different combination of words.

Our competitive advantage resides on the ability to:

- Include users that either cannot or would rather not communicate using a language other than their own native one.
- Differentiation based on respect for cultural issues, since language is such a strong manifestation of culture.
- Reduce costs by minimizing the need for other communication mediums such as long distance phone calls.
- Adaptability to future scenarios -if video and audio become the next IM must-have our approach still provides added value; IM, like e-mail and text-messaging, has a specialised language associated with it. Unlike e-mail, the language of IM is still evolving and consequently, our decoupled architecture is scalable.

In what industry would your proposed venture compete?

The proposed venture should compete in the Software Services industry.

What attributes (in terms of its demonstrated ability to execute on your industry's critical success factors and its connections up, down, and across the value chain) does your proposed entrepreneurial team possess and/or lack to make this venture a reality?

We have significant experience and know-how in software design and engineering with a good portfolio of successfully developed Web-based marketplaces and services.

We have a good understanding of, and are well connected within, the software industry's suppliers and customers.

We are a multi-cultural, multi-lingual team of friends which is, in the light of the project described, an advantaged in itself.

We have strong knowledge of international economics and finance, but lack specialised marketing, business and management skills in our team.

We are all highly motivated, creative, ambitious and natural-born risk-takers -only lacking first-hand experience with the business start-up processes.