

INTRODUCTION TO NETMEETING



A product developed by Microsoft Corporation that enables groups to teleconference using the Internet as the transmission medium. NetMeeting supports Voice on the Net, chat sessions, a whiteboard, and application sharing. It's built into Microsoft's Internet Explorer Web browser.

It is available as a free download from <http://www.microsoft.com/netmeeting/> and weighs in at an astounding 1.6Mb. It is so small (for a Microsoft application) that you can even run the program directly from the site. Once installed, you set it up and then you can start communicating with people from all around the world. But is it that easy...



NetMeeting uses your existing Internet connection to allow conferencing calls to be made to other users. If you do not have an Internet connection, then you cannot use NetMeeting to make a conference call (obviously!), but you can use it to prepare materials you may use at a later time.

After installing the software, you are taken through a setup procedure which will include:

Entering a user name;

Entering a valid e-mail address (one method of contacting others is via e-mail);

Checking the sound playback and record levels (a microphone is very useful here!);

Checking the video capture device, if a camera is being used (useful, but not essential).



Philips Vesta Pro PC camera

A web camera is needed if you want to see the people you are conferencing with. They are widely available and range in cost from around £35 (cheap and cheerful) up to around £125. Sony have recently released a matchbox sized camera for £99 which gives superb images. Prepare to pay around £60 for a decent model from Philips or Kodak. Note that the more expensive cameras usually have a built-in microphone.

It is worth investing in a separate microphone which can be hand held. This prevents you having to shout into the camera's (or sometimes even the monitor's) built in mic. One of the problems you will certainly encounter is *mic howl*, the feedback sound when microphones pick up the sound from the speakers. Being able to move the microphone away from the speakers will help to reduce this problem. It may also be an advantage to use headphones instead of speakers, again reducing the problems caused by feedback. Expect to pay between £5 to £15 for a reasonable microphone.

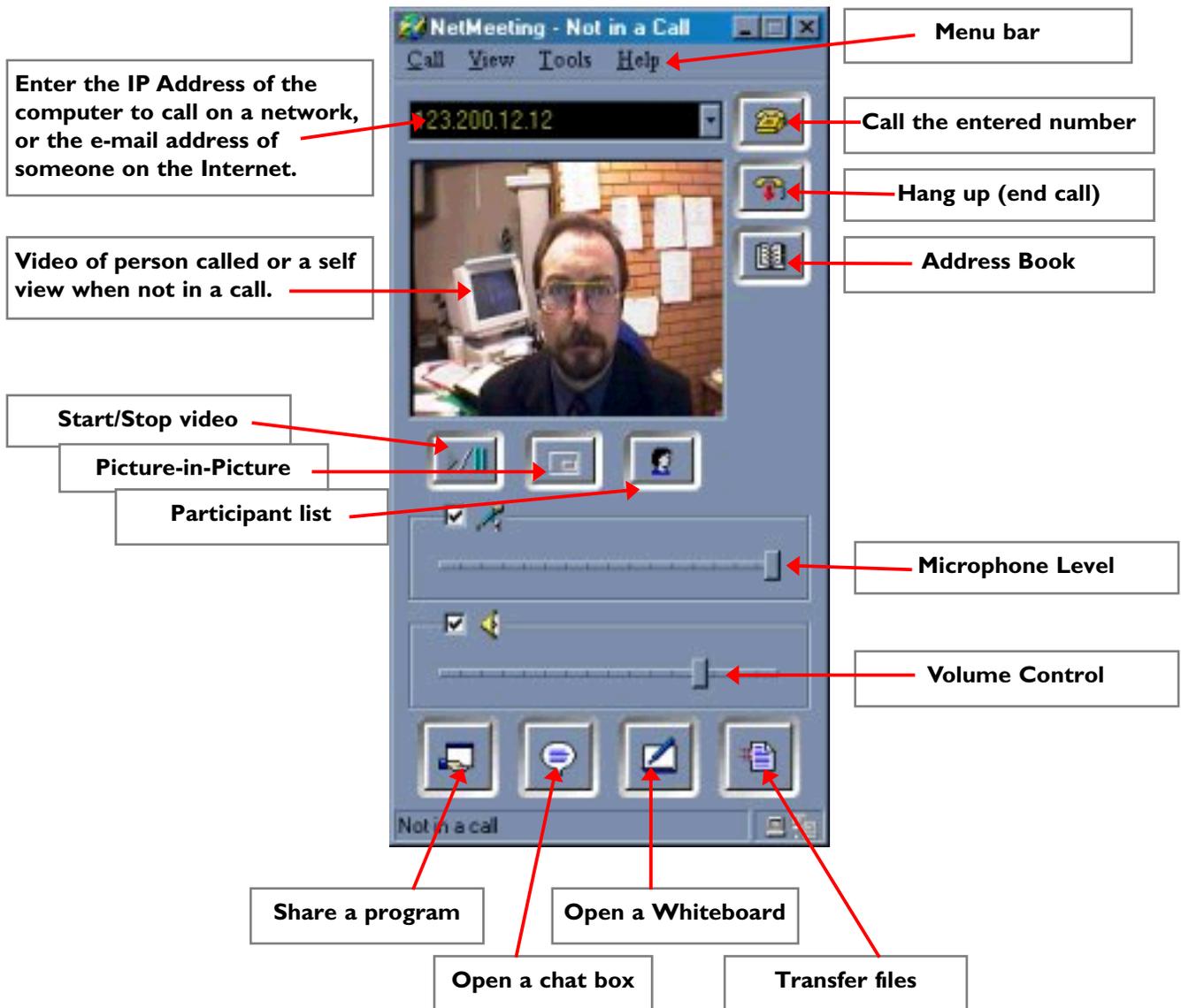


Sony CMR-PCI

Don't worry too much if you get any of this wrong during the setup procedure as you can change any of the settings at any time when you run the program. Notice that once installed, you will have a NetMeeting icon both on the computer desktop and on the taskbar. The difference between the locations is simply that you would double-click the desktop icon to run NetMeeting, but only single-click the taskbar icon. Run the program and refer to the diagram on the next page for an overview of the facilities provided by NetMeeting.



OVERVIEW OF NETMEETING

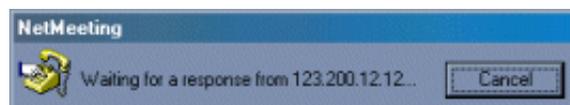


To call someone using NetMeeting, you will need to know their address. On a network system (local or wide area), you will have to discover the *IP address* of the computer to call. There are two ways of doing this: by far the easiest is to Select **Help** from the menu bar and choose *About NetMeeting...* from the menu. At the bottom of the displayed window will be you computer's IP address in standard *quad-dot* format, e.g. **123.200.12.1** You should e-mail (or even 'phone) this information to the person you are going to conference with, or they could follow the same procedure and forward the information to you.

For a fuller, more detailed examination of your computer's setup, you can run the **IP Configuration** application. Do this by Selecting the *Start* button, choosing *Run...* from the menu and entering **winipcfg** in the *Open:* icon. In the window which appears, choose the network card's name from the pull-down list at the top, then you can read the IP Address in the main window. The first method is by far the easier of the two!

If you are using NetMeeting on a standard Internet connection using a modem, you could simply enter the e-mail address of the person to call. However, for this to work, the person must be listed on an Internet Directory, of which there are quite a few. Unfortunately, you will find that the directories (sometimes called ILS servers) will have some rather unsavoury characters listed, so this is not a recommended way of contacting people. If at all possible, use the IP address method, as this guarantees that you must contact the person before starting a conference call.

TASK



Start up NetMeeting and perform a check on the way it has been set up. Although you (most probably) will not have access to a camera, you should check that sound has been set up correctly. Select **Tools** in the menu bar and use the *Audio Tuning Wizard* and *Options*. Please check that your computer is set to the correct time.

Now find out the *IP address* of the computer you are working on and make a note of it. E-mail this information to the person you are going to conference with. You should also receive an e-mail with the IP details of that person's computer. In your e-mail, you should state who is going to initiate the conference and at what time.

At the agreed time, begin the conference call by entering the IP address of the computer you wish to connect to. Hopefully, the other person will accept the call and you can begin to converse.

CONFERENCING PLUS

As well as the rather obvious ways of video conferencing - seeing the person you are talking to, NetMeeting provides a few additional utilities which can add value to your chat! These include the ability to share an application and simultaneously work on a document (this does mean that you have to take turns!), a chat area for sending and receiving instant text messages, a whiteboard (a shared area which allows text and images to be created over several pages) and the ability to send and receive files from one computer to the other.

I should mention at this point that NetMeeting allows many participants to be involved in the conference, not just one-to-one! Select the **Participant List** button to view a list of the people you are conferencing with. Note that in the chat area, you can choose who to send text to when there are many people involved in the conference.

Probably one of the most useful items you will find is the **Whiteboard**, as you can pre-prepare screens that you may want to use during a conference. As mentioned earlier, you can incorporate text and images on the Whiteboard pages, as well as cut out areas of your computer's screen to include on a page. The image here shows a whiteboard with text in a variety of fonts, weights and colours as well as part of my computer's screen:

Brief Notes:

After you have entered some text using the A tool, you can move the text block around the screen by dragging with the Select tool (*Arrow*). This action applies to all objects on the screen. When a text block is selected, you can alter its attributes by choosing a colour from the palette and selecting the *Font Options...* Button.

When you use the drawing or highlighter tools, you can specify the line width from a selection which automatically appears and a colour from the palette.

To add a new page to the Whiteboard, Select the + icon at the bottom right of the window. You can use the arrow keys to move between pages you have created.



A page of a Whiteboard showing both text and graphics

Don't forget that a Whiteboard and its contents are shared. This means that conference members can edit the information on the pages. Should you want to, you can prevent anyone altering the information by locking the contents; do this by selecting the *padlock* icon.

One of the benefits of the Whiteboard is that you can prepare pages in advance of a conference so that materials can be used for training purposes as well as having a common area for doodling which is both interactive and immediate. Open a new Whiteboard from the **File** menu in the menu bar.

TASK

Create a number of Whiteboard pages that could be used in a training session on a subject of your own choosing. Use text and graphics as the main components but also use the highlighter and pointer tools when actually conferencing to clarify your main points. Save the Whiteboard. When you are ready, begin a conference with a colleague and open the Whiteboard. Explain how you would use the Whiteboard to aid a distance training session.

When you have completed the conference, how would you rate the Whiteboard facility in NetMeeting as a training device? Is it more useful as a device for trainers or would you envisage students using it as a collaborative tool?

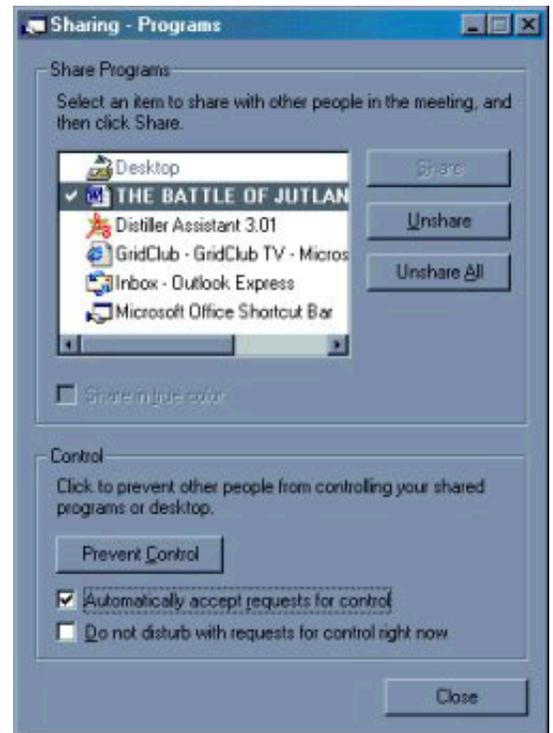
APPLICATION SHARING

When it comes to learning how to use a program or Windows application, you can't beat being shown by someone who knows how! This is yet another feature of NetMeeting - the ability to share an application, even if the other person does not have that application on their system.

To share an application, for example **Microsoft Word**, run the program and open a new document. If you wish, you can enter some information or open a pre-prepared document ready to share. When you are ready to begin the collaboration, select the *Share Program* button in NetMeeting to display a window showing the programs which are currently running on your system; in the list should be your Word document. (Note that you will not be able to select anything if you are not currently in a conference call). When you select the document for sharing, it is worth also checking that the *Allow Control* and *Automatically accept requests for control* choices are made, otherwise you will be continually asked to accept control by the other conferencee each time they try to collaborate with you.

When the above has been done, the person with whom you are conferencing will see the chosen application on their screen. When you are in control of the document, the other person will see your initials attached to the mouse pointer. When the other person clicks their mouse button over the document, they will take control and you will see their initials attached to the mouse pointer.

You should be aware that whilst someone else has control of the document, they could (if they wanted to) access your files through an explorer window and do some damage to your computer. You really have to trust the person you are collaborating with! Having said that, you should ensure from the very outset of the conference that you have laid down and agreed some ground rules of what is and is not acceptable during the call. If you want to just show the document but not allow the other person to take control, select the *Prevent Control* button, or untick the *Automatically accept requests for control* choice.



Sharing a Word document

TASK

Open an MS Office application that you are comfortable in using (Word, Excel etc.) and make a conference call to a colleague. When connected, share the Office application and explain the main features of the program. Allow the other person to demonstrate their understanding of your explanation by giving them control and following your instructions.

When you are ready to save the document, prevent control of the application by the other person and demonstrate how they would save the document. Note that the other people on the conference call cannot save the document onto their machines as it exists solely on your computer. What they see is simply an image generated by your computer.

If they want a copy of the document which was shared, you will have to send it to them...

TRANSFERRING FILES

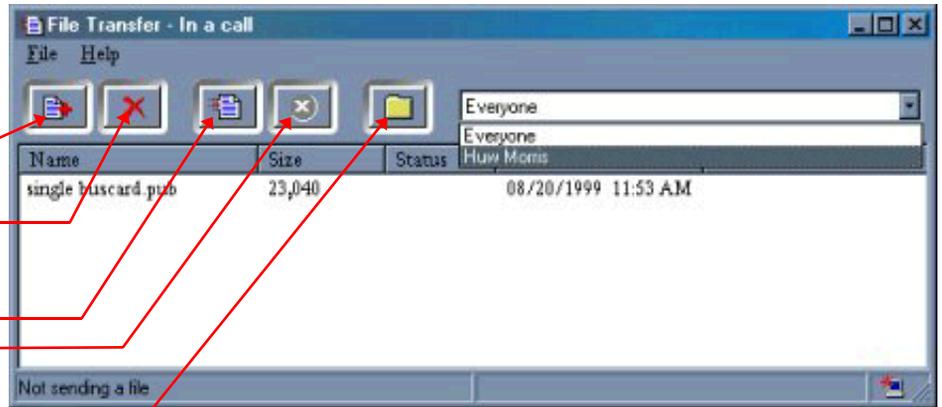
To send and receive files, NetMeeting uses the FTP (File Transfer Protocol) method, similar to downloading and uploading files to and from the Internet. It is inadvisable to send really big files using this method, as transfer speeds will be slow. In the main, try not to transfer files bigger than 1Mb.

Having said that, sending a file is as easy as selecting the Transfer files button to open the dialogue box, choosing the file to send and clicking the send file button. When many people are in the conference, you can choose who to send the file(s) to from a pull-down list (if you don't specify, the file will be sent to everyone!).

The picture opposite shows the **File Transfer** window with a *Publisher* (.pub) file added to the window (use the first button to *Add files* to the list). If you want to remove files from the list use the second button after selecting a file.

When you have completed your list of files to send, click the third button to *Send All* the files in the list (button 4 stops a transfer).

Any files you have received can be viewed by selecting button 5, which opens a folder containing the files, allowing you to copy them elsewhere, run them, open them etc.



Preparing to send a Publisher file to Huw Morris



A file is coming

When a file(s) is being transferred to your computer, this window opens on your screen. It is simply telling you that a file (a TextEase file in this case) has been transferred from (in this case) Huw Morris and asking what should be done with it. The choices are rather obvious, but note that you can't Open it unless you have the TextEase program on your computer.

TASK

Transfer the file you working on in the previous task to a colleague. Ask your colleague to amend the file and send it back to you. When you receive the file back, open it to find out what changes were made to the file.

Open a Chat window and discuss the changes that were made to the document (I'll leave you to figure out how the Chat system works!).