

AOL revamps AIM in hopes of stanching user exodus

November 16 2011, By RACHEL METZ , AP Technology Writer

AOL is giving its AIM instant-messaging software a new look and new features in hopes of stanching an ongoing exodus of users who have turned to texting and other online messaging services.

The new AIM software marks the service's biggest revamp in several years and comes as AOL tries to revitalize its business. A Web pioneer back in the '90s, AOL has been struggling as its dial-up Internet service declines and its online content and advertising business isn't generating enough revenue yet to make up for it.

AOL made a preview version available Wednesday.

Among AIM's new features is the ability to view Web-based photos and videos within a chat window. Previously users would just see a link they would have to click to open a new browser window containing the image or video.

AIM will also now sync all the messages you send and receive across various devices you use to access the service, helping to prevent missed messages.

And its iconic "Buddy List" has given way to a list of AIM friends ordered by how recently you've chatted with them.

In an interview, Jason Shellen, AOL's head of AIM products, said many people think of AIM as "instant pestering."

Shellen, who joined AOL in 2010 when it bought the company behind online [social software](#) Brizzly, said the new software is "less instant, more message."

The effort to revitalize AIM - which was originally released in 1997 - comes as instant-messaging traffic is falling precipitously. Consumers are flock to social-networking sites including [Facebook](#) and Twitter, use the built-in chat features on sites such as Facebook and [Google](#) Inc.'s [Gmail](#) and send an ever-growing number of text messages.

In a move to keep people chatting over its service, AIM has allowed users to chat with friends on a number of other instant-messaging services, including Facebook's and Google's. This doesn't appear to be helping much, though.

According to [comScore](#) Inc., usage of instant-messaging services in the U.S. fell 31 percent to 36.8 million visitors in October, compared with a year ago.

The numbers are particularly bad for AIM, the third-largest instant-messaging service behind Yahoo Inc.'s Yahoo Messenger and Microsoft Corp.'s Windows Live Messenger. ComScore estimates that AIM had 4.9 million visitors last month, down 65 percent from a year ago. (The numbers do not include access from mobile devices and tablet computers).

"If we left AIM alone, it would keep tapering off as is," Shellen said. "I think the reason to do this as a company is because AOL wants to show the world it's not the same old [AOL](#)."

More information: <http://preview.aim.com>

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