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Developing Ambient Displays for Collaborative Work

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This paper discusses a prototype system known as the Ambient Workplace (AW) that lets people monitor work patterns within a group of co-workers.

The AW provides information in the user's peripheral attention zone with the objective being that the user soaks up the information without needing to specifically attend to it. Information is displayed within standard applications such as the Windows Active Desktop, Outlook or Word. At present the system displays various types of awareness information, for example the number of interactions a specific user or group of users has initiated and whether they are online. It also displays global information about the volume and type of work for the entire group. The Ambient Workplace uses Python and displays information using Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG). It uses a client/server architecture built upon the XMPP instant messaging protocol and retrieves information from a MySQL database. The objective was to build a system which can be easily ported to other platforms such as mobile phones and smart boards as well as to leverage existing libraries while allowing rapid prototyping of the user interface.

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