

How to Annoy People Using Instant Messaging

01/14/2007 - Instant messaging can be great as [a tool for collaboration](#), but it can also be disruptive and annoying. We wrote before about [how to screw up an email negotiation](#). Now let's see how you can use IM to bother your favorite and not-so-favorite work associates.

Remember that instant messaging is synchronous, intrusive, and often tedious: in other words, an ideal platform for making a pest of yourself.

Disregard any presence indicators your colleagues use such as busy or away. Your needs are more important than anyone else's and you know that some people regularly set their IM status to busy or away even when they're working on unimportant stuff. Bonus: if you catch someone at the computer when she says she's away, berate her for it. She needs to set her presence indicators according to your needs not her own.

Never check whether a person has time to chat. If he's online and reachable, he's all yours! In particular, make sure you never ask about someone's availability for a work-related chat at these special times of day: in the late afternoon, when he might be trying to finish his work so he can go home; early in the morning, when he might be taking advantage of quiet time to be productive; and the middle of the night, when, if he's on the computer at all, he's probably not thinking about work.

Don't set your own presence indicators when you're busy or away from the computer. That way people trying to get a quick answer from you will feel first hopeful and then frustrated. Long term, you can utterly confuse the people you work with by setting one IM account to "busy," one to "away," and one to "available," making them into random noise. Then, when someone IMs you on the "available" account, chew him out for bothering you when you've got something important to do.

Don't pause to give the person a chance to respond. Stream-of-your-own-consciousness is a great way to show that you matter and your conversational partner doesn't. Ask a question, and then ask another, or answer it yourself. Type each sentence with a "..." after it so you can indicate that you have more (and more... and more...) to say.

But when you do pause, expect instantaneous replies. When someone is IM'ing with you, she should only be IM'ing with you, not doing anything else. You should expect her to close down all other chats, turn away completely from whatever she was doing, and give you her full attention.

Consider instant messaging as a way of getting personal therapy. This works especially well with your busiest and most driven associates. It's good for them to help another. They need to be exposed to the reality of the human condition with all its angst and ennui. Don't hold your pain inside—instant messaging equals instant catharsis. There. Don't you feel better now?

Don't ever use correct capitalization or punctuation. *ur 2 kewl 4 dat!* You feel comfortable with the brave new world of IM, why shouldn't everyone else? Shift keys are for sissies.

Expect that IM conversations will always be like phone conversations, with a definite goodbye at the end. If your colleague hasn't signed off, that means the discussion is still going, so keep on typing messages even if you've found out what you need to know. Don't notice when the pauses between your entries and the responses get longer and longer and longer. The longer you keep the session going, the more likely you are to annoy.

Send large files without asking whether it's okay. You know better than anyone what people need. Don't have any qualms about using up other people's download bandwidth and hard drive space.

Sprinkle emoticons liberally into your messages. One in a sentence is good, two is better, three provides maximum distraction and visual harassment. Don't know all the ones you can use? Bookmark the one you need: [AOL](#), [GTalk](#), [MSN](#), and [Yahoo](#).

Try out all the abbreviations you can think of. Learn new ones every day, so you can be as compact and opaque in your communication as possible. Don't stick with the ones everyone knows—lol ("laughing out loud"), brb ("be right back"), and np ("no problem"). Try out some new ones, especially on people you know are likely to be unfamiliar with them. How about ptmm ("please tell me more") or wdalyic ("who died and left you in charge") or issygti ("I'm so sure you get the idea")?

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