INSTANT CASE STUDY

Fostering a Sense of Community with Pre-Configured Sametime Buddy Lists

The Customer: Athabasca University Centre for Innovative Management

Athabasca University (AU) is a publicly funded institution of the Province of Alberta (Canada).   In 1994, AU's Centre for Innovative Management logged on with the world's first fully interactive online Executive MBA program. Today, the AU MBA is Canada's largest Executive MBA program, and is hailed as one of the most respected online Executive MBAs in the world.

AU's Challenge: Enhance Collaboration Amongst Geographically-dispersed Students

The Centre for Innovative Management designs its graduate management courses using IBM Lotus Notes. This enables students to access course information and materials, conduct group discussions, complete teamwork projects, and submit coursework electronically. Students, faculty, and staff are all connected, creating a dynamic, interactive learning environment while giving students the support and service they need. At the same time, students are able to communicate with their peers in real-time via IBM Lotus Sametime.

"The core of our learning environment is asynchronous in which Executive MBA students are completing the program from many time zones and different times of day and night," says David Poshtar, Senior Systems Analyst—System Administration for Athabasca University. "IM's inherent presence awareness enables students to see when their classmates are also online. This helps us build community—students can see each other, which increases their sense of shared experience."

AU's classes are broken into small groups that change with each course, necessitating the manual creation of new buddy lists for each student as they move through the program.

"We documented the procedure for creating relevant student groups," says Mr Poshtar, "but still our Help Desk was faced with a number of calls for assistance with finding and adding student colleagues. We needed a way to automate the process so that every student would derive maximum value from Sametime."

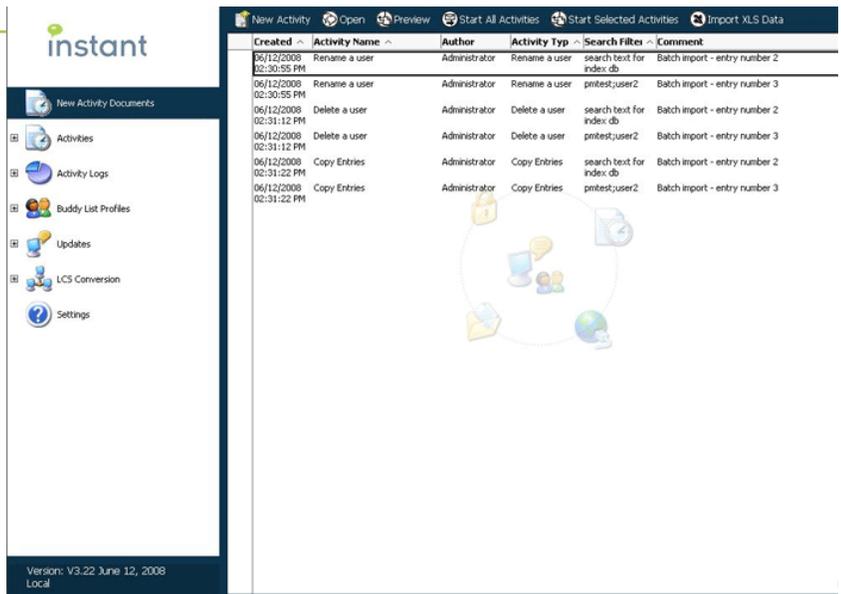### Instant Solution: Instant Buddy List Administrator

Instant Buddy List Administrator provides centrally-controlled, server-side management of IBM Lotus Sametime contacts, groups, and group memberships. Its server-side management console simplifies and automates high-frequency tasks such as adding, modifying, and deleting members of Sametime groups; creating and publishing public groups; copying buddy lists from masters; renaming users after a name change; and removing certain users from all buddy list memberships.

How it Works

Mr Poshtar's team integrated Instant Buddy List Administrator into their course deployment process.

With help from Instant Technologies, AU built a custom component that automatically triggers a buddy list provisioning process: As students are enrolled in their courses, Buddy List Administrator creates and publishes buddy lists of their peers in those same courses.

"Buddy list provisioning is no longer something we require every student to customize," says Mr Poshtar. "When students join the program, and when they move from course to course, we are able to update their student groups automatically based on where they are in the program."

The Results: Improved Collaboration, Fewer Calls to the Help Desk

Prior to the deployment of Instant Buddy List Administrator, students had to self-manage updates to their groups with each new course. Unfortunately, not everyone knew how to do this or was even aware that it was possible (even though it was documented). At the start of each new course, the Help Desk ended up assisting a significant number of students with configuring their new Sametime groups.

"Our students' use of the technology we provide is vital to their success in the program," says Mr Poshtar. "Thanks to Buddy List Administrator, technology utilization is now more seamless for both our students and our Help Desk staff."

Buddy List Administrator automatically provides students with accurate Sametime groups from the moment they start a new course.

"Buddy List Administrator makes Sametime group memberships transparent to our students," continues Mr Postar. "No intervention is required from our students as they move through the program. Their changing Sametime groups are all centrally managed on the back end so that new or updated entries are automatic. Our bottom line—students spend their time focused on collaborating with their peers and their professors, and on their learning, rather than configuring their buddy lists."

About Instant Technologies

Instant Technologies specializes in developing innovative, enterprise-class compliance and productivity solutions for IBM Lotus Sametime and Microsoft Office Communications Server, including IM archiving, IM queue management, persistent chat rooms, IM bot development, buddy list administration, and more. Instant Technologies is a Lotus Advanced Business Partner and a Microsoft Registered Partner headquartered in Durham, NH.