

# WORLD JAM: Talk among 50,000 +.

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**Abstract.** For 72 hours WORLD JAM provided a platform where all IBM employees could help each other by using the intranet as a different kind of portal—for conversation. WORLD JAM was envisioned as a safe place where every employee could ask for, and offer, practical solutions to everyday challenges. This poster presents WORLD JAM's motivation, the scope of the experiment, the design of social cues for the site, data collection during use, and preliminary findings.

## What is WORLD JAM?

In music, a jam session is when musicians gather to play. No one knows what will be produced—only that it will be something that's never been heard before. For the last several years IBM has been experimenting with intellectual jam sessions. We gather experts, give them a problem and set them loose. Like a group of musicians, they create a series of "riffs": great ideas that might not have surfaced through more traditional problem-solving processes.

WORLD JAM was conceived as a way to extend this to *all* IBMers, no matter their location or occupation. The *intranet* seemed the perfect medium to reach out across the 320,000 employees in 20 regions worldwide. A number of existing technologies were repurposed to provide a sense of place and state to the otherwise stateless medium of the internet. For example, broadcast technology for the Olympics was reversed to feed activity information into one visual display—the Activity Map. This poster will present the design of the event, the technologies used, and the issues tackled in order to study the event.

## Where's the Action?

For many reasons WORLD JAM was a social experiment rather than just a piece of technology implementation. While IBM has a variety of methods whereby their employees can communicate to each other<sup>1</sup>, WORLD JAM aimed to be different by providing access on one web-based platform during the event, while striving for blended synchrony [Erickson, 2000 #2] and awareness of others presence.

Awareness is provided by the Activity Map (Figure 1)—a visual display that represents the activity of participants located on a 2-D representation of the world. As people participate within WORLD JAM—by looking at pages, posting, or voting on ideas—the activity map changes both by geography and discussion, in order to reflect the current state of the site, and to convey a feeling of aliveness and presence. We intended to draw people in by showing a high-level picture of activity. Thus the map can also be used to navigate to each of the fora. We also sought to support community-building social processes (such as belonging).

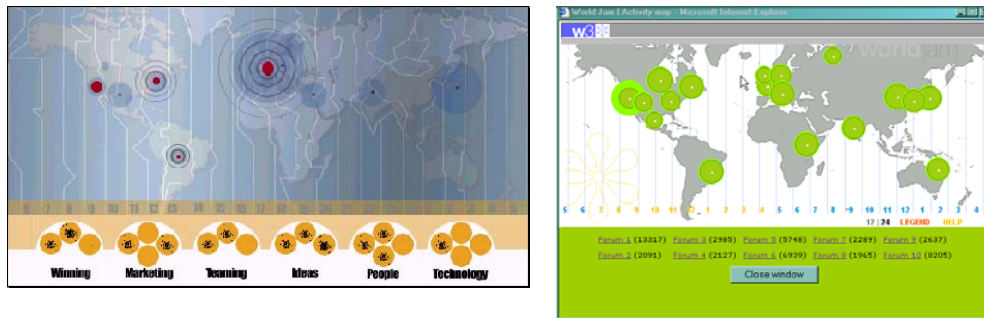


Figure 1. Activity map design prototype (left) and as implemented (right).

## What does a Fortune 500 company look like collaborating?

The large participant size (52000) and short time frame (72 hours) posed many problems for analysis. We are combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore patterns of interaction and the process of mediating conversation, as well as discussion, among so many. Within the fora we saw very different interaction patterns. Most fora had a bulletin board quality, with an average of one reply per posting. However two fora had deeper, more conversational patterns. We're also interested in the process of encouraging and fostering the event itself. The poster will report our findings from interviews, surveys, and online observations, as well as log file analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, LOTUS NOTES email and databases, mainframe based forums (like Usenet discussion lists), LOTUS TEAMROOMS, QUICKPLACE online spaces, and SOMETIME, an instant messaging platform

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