

Wireless AOL Instant Messenger AIM for WAP 2001 User Study Report

January 31, 2002

**By
Logan Jaeren
Sr. UI Designer
AOL Anywhere**

1 Survey Results

An online user survey was conducted from December 14, 2001 to December 21, 2001 to collect AIM for WAP user experience data. Results from the user survey include user demographics, factors affecting the AIM for WAP user experience, and testimonials from users.

1.1 Responses To Survey Questions

All the survey participants are AOL members, so it is not surprising that 97% of the survey participants use AOL Instant Messenger on a desktop computer, either via the AOL client or via the AIM desktop client. User expectations for features and operational behavior for wireless AIM services most likely originates from the AIM user experience gained while using AIM on the desktop. The responses to survey questions that represent a consensus of 4.5% or more of the total survey participants are presented along with the rationale for posing the question, and several poignant quotes from users in response to the question.

1.1.1 What was your primary reason for using AIM?

This question was asked in order to examine the primary factors that motivate participants to use AIM for WAP.

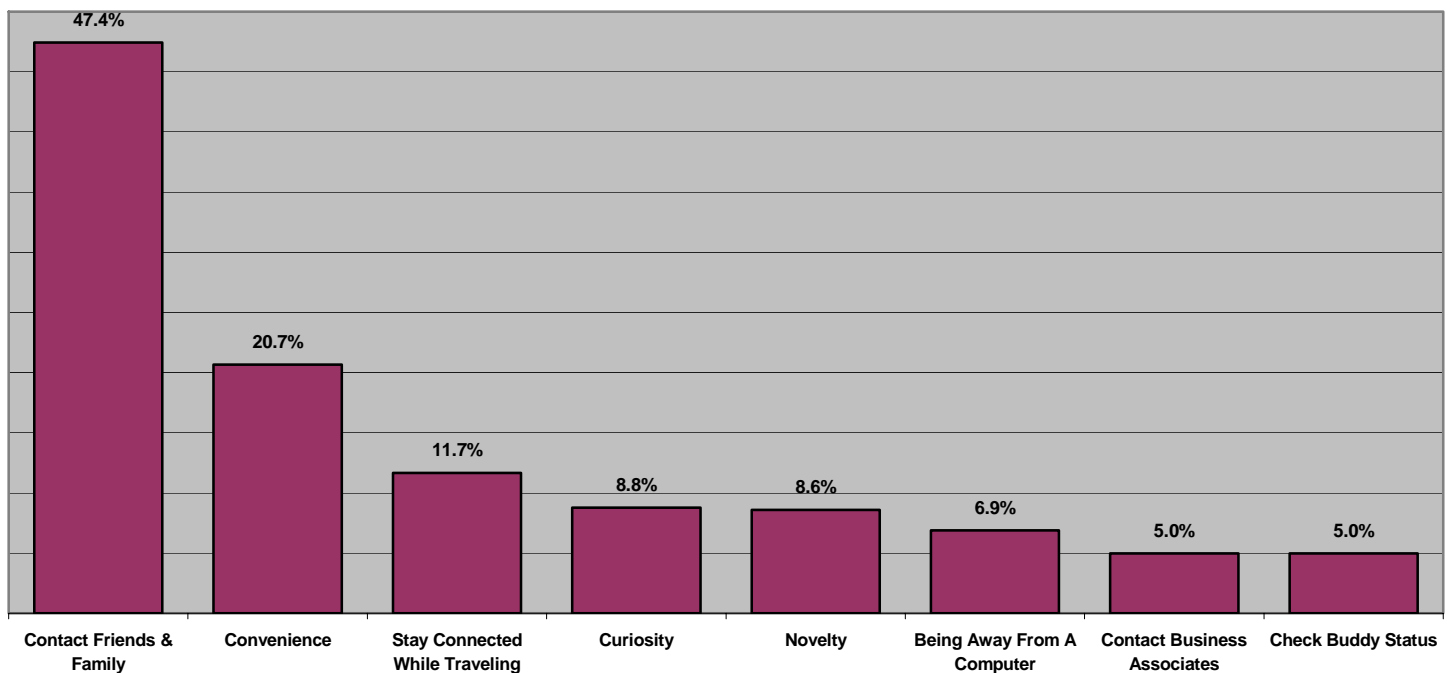


Figure 1 - Primary reasons for using AIM for WAP

“Convenience, I know screen names - but not always phone numbers...”

~

“To stay in touch with important friends as I travel, or when away from home such as when I was staying at the hospital with my father who was in intensive care.”

~

“Just to chat briefly with friends, or to relieve boredom in a meeting.”

~

“To be able to IM kids at home who are tying up the phone line.”

1.1.2 What did you like about AIM?

This question was asked in order to identify the positive attributes of AIM for WAP.

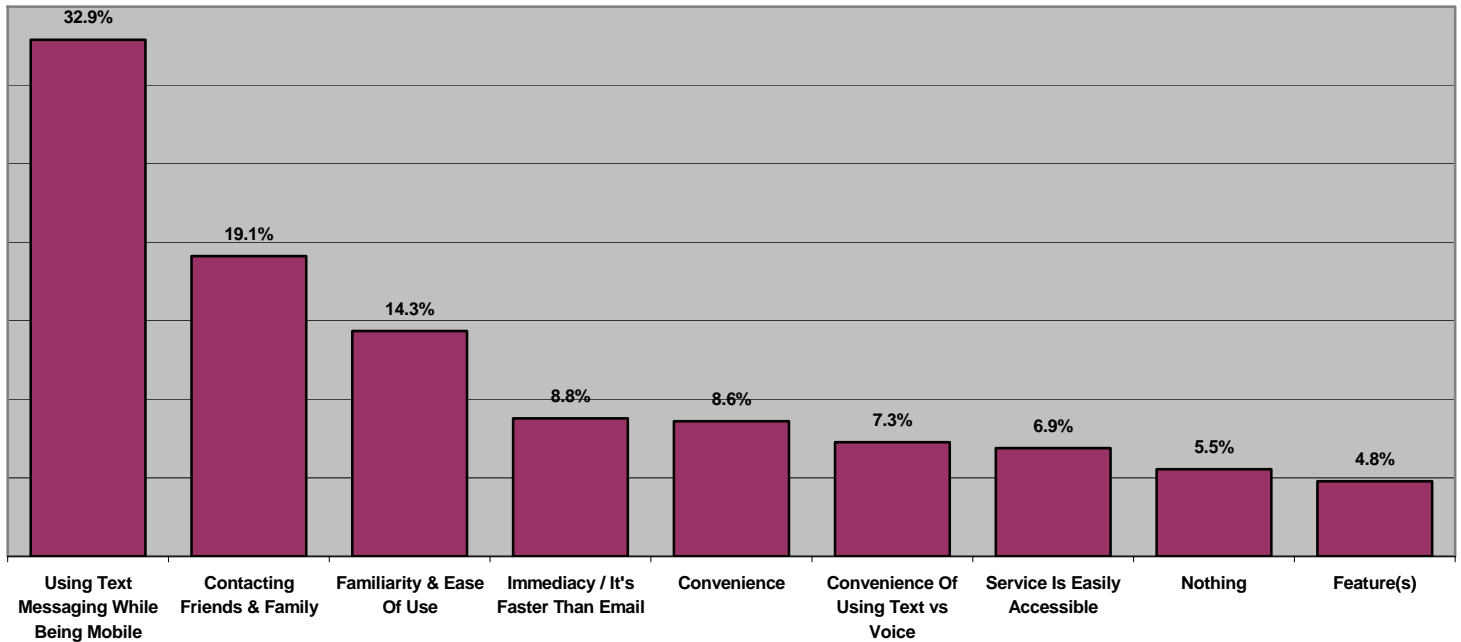


Figure 2 - Positive aspects of AIM for WAP

"I can use AOL anywhere."
~
"I can be ANYWHERE, and chat with people ANYWHERE."
~
"being able to correspond while in a meeting or someplace where quiet is advisable"
~
"Easy, fast way to communicate that allows one to think before they speak"
~
"People can contact me even if I am away from a computer and they don't have to call me on my cellphone they just message me."
~
"nearly universal, everyone i know has it"
~
"actually it's just about useless...impossible to safely use while driving"
~
"with a t9 equipped phone, it is fairly easy to communicate"
~
"I love the instant communication with friends and family, even if all I have with me is my phone."
~
"I like Wireless AIM because of the fact that it allows me to communicate without the burden of using a laptop and a modem."
~
"AOL anywhere I want it"

1.1.3 What do you find difficult to use?

This question was asked in order to identify the key issues affecting the user experience of current AIM for WAP users. The data values represent the percentage of the total *Current Users*.

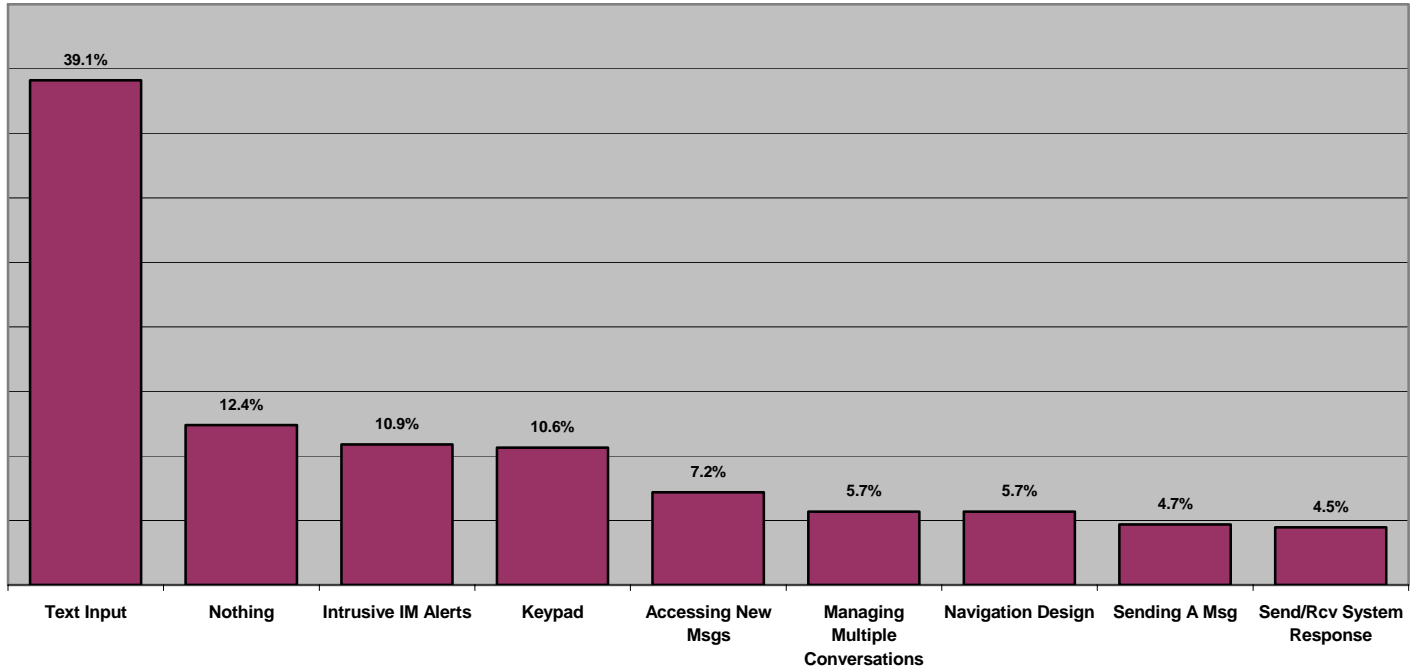


Figure 3 - Negative aspects of AIM for WAP (Current Users Only)

“wish there was an easier way to type besides t9, it can take awhile to write a sentence”

~

“Next to impossible to keep up with conversations on the phone keypad.”

~

“Main drawback to any use of instant messenger on the phone is the keypad. ... If the phone incorporated the same key pad as the mobile communicator, it would be fantastic.”

~

“AIM on sprint phones is very cumbersome - needs to be more streamlined - less button pushing - more intuitive, not from knowing how to, its easy to figure it out, i mean more intuitive from the standpoint of not having to navigate and press lots of buttons to accomplish a simple task”

~

“the typing till I upgraded to a new phone that has T9 text so i don't have to hit the keys multiple times”

~

“Typing on the number keys, every incoming response takes no less that 4 key strokes to read, totally breaks the flow of conversation, tedious as all hell to keep even the most simple conversation going. Very awkward to use overall”

~

“Anytime I was in the middle of writing an IM to someone, and received an IM, a different screen would pop up that I had to deal with, in order to get back to the one I was in the middle of writing. Considering how long it takes to "write" using a phone, it's really inconvenient. Also, it wasn't possible to go back and correct a typo - rather I had to backspace and delete everything til that point and re-type.”

1.1.4 What was the single most significant issue that prompted you to stop using AIM?

This question was asked in order to identify the key factors that result in the discontinued use of AIM for WAP. The data values represent the percentage of the total *Previous Users*.

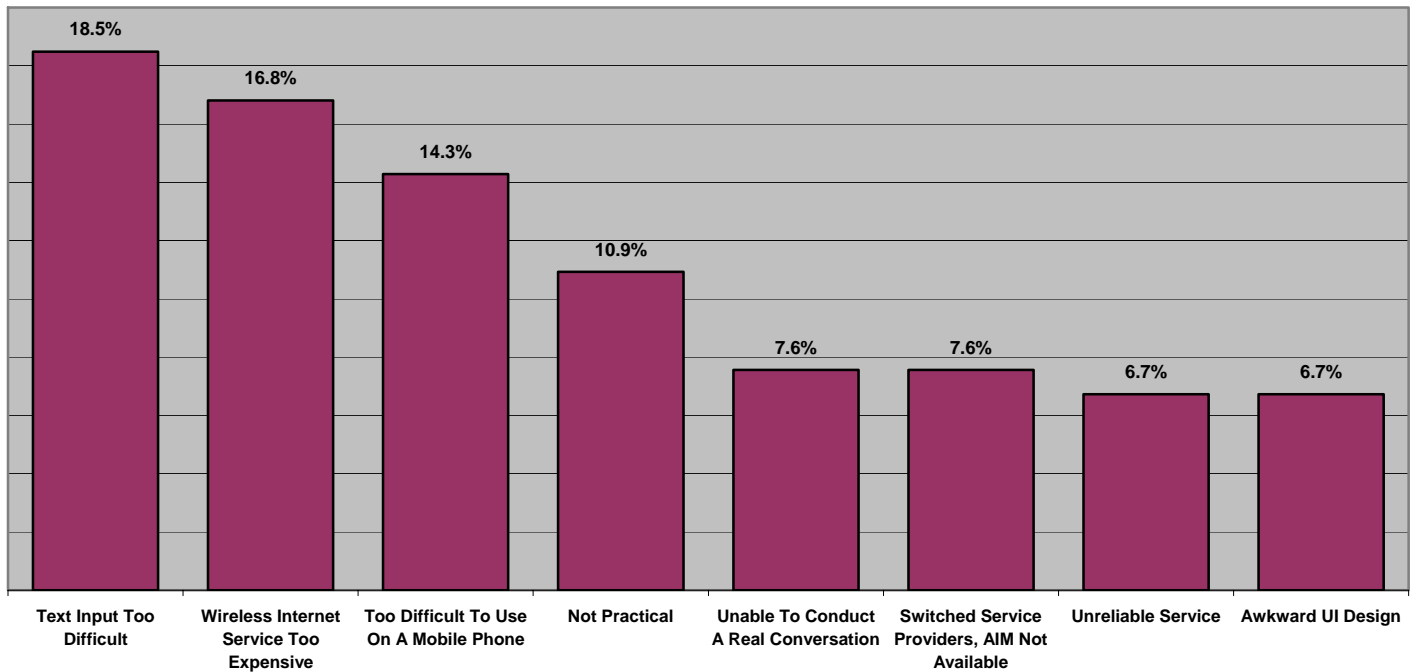


Figure 4 - Key factors that prompt users to stop using AIM for WAP (Previous Users Only)

“Two things: 1) IMing through the phone interface is unbelievably painful. It could be used by the Inquisition to force heretics to recant. Honestly - you need a text pager or Mobile Communicator keyboard scheme for this to be worthwhile. Every time, I would get maybe one IM sent - that would take several minutes... and it occurred to me that I'm holding a phone. This is sort of like putting the remote control on top of the TV every time you change a channel... what's the point? Next IM was always, "what is your number there?" And I called. It's just more trouble than it's worth to try to type via a phone number pad. 2) The AIM connection and wireless web used my phone minutes. I did not know this... and it ran my time WAY over what I thought I was using on the calls. So, basically it was very frustrating - and it cost me an extra 30 bucks. Not worth it.”

“I started to use the mobile communicator it is much easier to use and faster It also makes typing much easier”

“difficulty in entering text (and my phone has T9 which didn't help because it always gets the words wrong and doesn't handle abbreviations well)”

“The most significant reason was the fact that the AIM service was too difficult to use on the cell phone. It was very time consuming just to write a few sentences. Secondly, the new technology where the phone "guesses" what you are wanting to type was ineffective.”

“Useless without a keyboard. A cell phone is a TERRIBLE way to write text”

“I thought wireless web fee was too much.”

1.1.5 What other issues contributed to your decision to stop using AIM?

This question was asked in order to identify the other factors that result in the discontinued use of AIM for WAP. For participants that chose to discontinue using AIM for WAP for reasons other than the top three mentioned in Figure 4, those users did indicate that text input, cost of service, and poor usability were other factors contributing to the decision to stop using AIM for WAP. The data values represent the percentage of the total *Previous Users*.

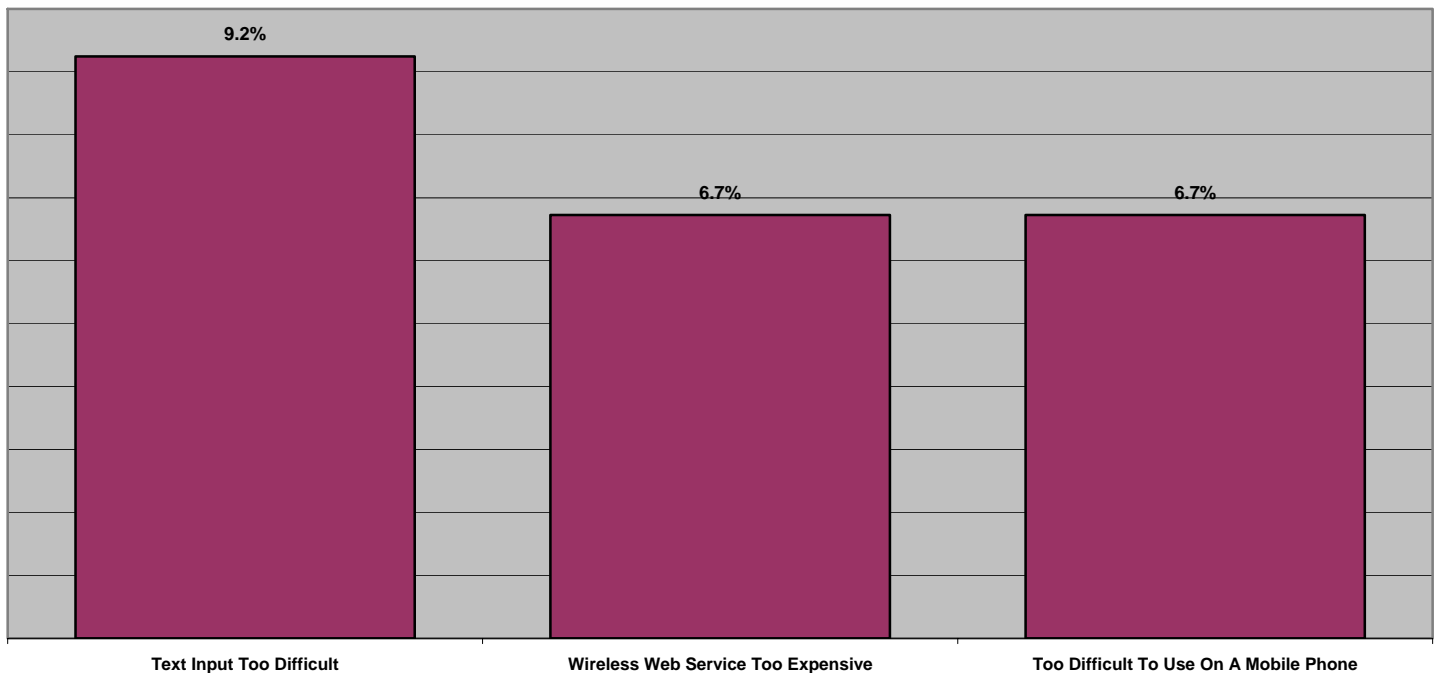


Figure 5 - Other factors that contribute to the decision to stop using AIM for WAP (Previous Users Only)

“The UI is kind of awkward -- it seems hard to do AIM with just 6 lines of text. Also, typing using the keypad takes forever and the T9 stuff is very aggravating to use.”

~

“Hard to type through numeric keypad, receiving and sending IM's were awkward due to poor engineering of software inside phone (I'd be pecking out a response, and when I got an IM it would kick me out of the composition screen interrupting me, etc..), and I also got an AOL mobile communicator, much better option.”

~

“...I like the notion - but it needs a better interface... and different structure impacting pricing. IMs are convenient - but only if they are an always on application. If I had to really watch my pager minutes (while it was on)... I wouldn't use it either - same thing for IMs :)”

~

“eventually got a Mobile Communicator”

~

“The interface of receiving a response and then sending one takes forever and becomes virtually useless. By the time I say ‘hello’ I could have had a 5 min conversation with the person by just calling that person.”

~

“amount of time between messages was too long. Didn't feel like a real conversation, as it does in the desktop version.”

2 Recommendations

Ninety-five percent of the user survey participants granted AOL Anywhere permission to contact them directly with any follow up questions related to AIM for WAP. Though the user survey did not focus specifically on text input issues, text input is the primary contributing factor that adversely affects the user experience. The user survey data documents that only eighteen survey participants acknowledged an awareness of T9 Text Input voluntarily. I recommend that a follow up survey be conducted in order to gather specific information related to the awareness and user experience of T9 Text Input. A benefit may be an assessment on the value of AOL promoting T9 Text Input to improve its effectiveness by raising public awareness of the user benefits from using T9 Text Input.

The results of the user study provide enough information to begin work on accomplishing the following AIM for WAP user interface design goals.

1. Designing support for creating, saving and using custom text messages (quick replies).
2. Expanding the offering of predefined text messages.
3. Expanding the design of the Buddy List to support more buddies.
4. Producing design guidelines for using graphics.
5. Reducing the level of intrusiveness of the IM alerts.
6. Simplifying the process for sending an instant message.
7. Simplifying navigation to access new instant messages.
8. Simplifying navigation between multiple conversations.
9. Improving the management of multiple IM alerts.
10. Improving the management of the Buddy List.
11. Simplifying the sign-on and sign-off process.
12. Improving error recovery.
13. Improving the language of system messages.
14. Improving the visibility and access of the AOL Instant Messaging service on the handset.
15. Promoting handset designs that improve the usability of wireless AIM services.