
The Disappearing Desktop (PIM 2008)

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Abstract

In an ideal world, we would always have the right information, in the right form, with the right context, right when we needed it. Unfortunately, we do not live in an ideal world. This workshop looks at how people in the real world manage to process massive amounts of information, and discusses how tools can bring real information interactions closer to the ideal.

Keywords

Personal information management, PIM, mobile, Web

ACM Classification Keywords

H5. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI).

Introduction

Personal information management (PIM) is the study and practice of the activities that people perform to acquire, organize, maintain, and retrieve information for everyday use. PIM is a growing area of interest as we all strive for better use of our limited personal resources of time, money, and energy, as well as greater workplace efficiency and productivity.

Personal information is fragmented across electronic documents, email messages, paper documents, instant messages, photographs, etc. Each type of information is organized and used to complete different tasks and to fulfill disparate roles in an individual's life. Existing PIM tools are partly responsible for this fragmentation. They can also be part of the solution that brings information together again.

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CHI 2008, April 5 – April 10, 2008, Florence, Italy
ACM 978-1-60558-012-8/08/04.

The field of personal information management is similarly fragmented across communities. Researchers exploring PIM-related topics frequent a large set of disparate conferences, including human computer interaction, database management, information retrieval, and artificial intelligence. The PIM 2008 workshop is part of a meeting held every year and a half designed to bring these communities together. The upcoming SIGCHI 2008 conference in Florence, Italy, represents an excellent opportunity to continue the momentum behind the topic and to engage a larger community of international researchers involved in human-computer interaction that relate directly to PIM.

Theme: *The Disappearing Desktop*

PIM 2008 will provide a forum for discussion of a wide range of PIM-related issues. But special focus will go to the ongoing revolution in mobile and Web-based tools for information management. Many people now rely primarily on mobile computers. Other people do not rely on a single device, but rather access, organize, and manage their personal information through any device that provides access to the Web. Developments in mobile and Web-based computing are pulling the traditional digital desktop apart. As this happens, we face new challenges and opportunities in personal information management.

Mobile Computing

Current mobile devices exceed the computing capacities of personal computers from only a few years back. Mobile computing allows people to make productive use of those small scraps of time between meetings, in traffic, or during half-time breaks that might otherwise be lost, and permits the effective, immediate use of bursts of creative energy that are

difficult to schedule or predict. But how can we keep mobile computing from encroaching on our lives?

Web Based Computing

The creation of personal Web content is becoming easier and easier. Much of what we do – shopping, selling, socializing, and working – is mediated by the Web. The Internet connects us to people, products, and information that enrich our lives. But there are challenges to using the Internet to manage our personal information. The small space we carve out on the Web can become its own self-affirming reality in which we “live” even to the neglect of our physical world. And the personal information we keep online poses a security risk. Identity theft is a real concern, and information about us, even when incorrect, can live on forever resisting our attempts to control or correct it. What are the implications of Web-based computing for our personal information management?

Day 1: Understanding PIM

The first day of the workshop will focus on understanding the activities people perform to manage, as best we can, in information-saturated worlds, including:

- *Finding and re-finding.* When information is scattered across devices, accounts, and applications, people may need to look in several places to find what they seek. Or, worse, people may forget to look in the first place [10].
- *Keeping.* Disparate organizational systems, file types, and devices, make it difficult to know where a new piece of information should go, or if it has already been kept before [4, 8]

- *Organizing & maintaining.* Fragmentation forces the separate organization and maintenance of several distinct collections [3, 8, 9]. Email, e-documents, paper documents, and Web references all come with their separate tools.

Day 2: Promising Approaches to PIM

Focus in Day 2 will shift from understanding how people manage their personal information to exploring promising solutions. Solutions will exemplify several general approaches, including:

- *Save everything.* Recording all of the information a person interacts with can make information accessible that might otherwise be irretrievable for want of connecting associations [1].
- *Search everything.* Finding [2] and re-finding [13] are important PIM activities. Search can bring together information that lies scattered across a personal space of information [5].
- *Structure everything.* Search can be complemented through the application of database management techniques that impose structure on collections [10, 13].
- *Unify everything.* File systems and window displays provide important kinds of unification. Other areas, such as unification via RDF, are being explored [7].
- *Everything through email.* Email is increasingly used to unify personal information [14]. People use email to convey information to different locations, to remind and manage tasks, and even to version and archive.

Challenges Facing PIM

In our efforts to better understand and better support personal information management, the workshop will address many challenges. These include:

- *Privacy protection.* People want to manage not only the information under their direct control, but also information about them that others have or can easily acquire [10, 13]
- *Group information.* The study of personal information management cannot succeed by considering a person in isolation from the various groups in which that person works and lives [6].
- *Information verticals.* There are a number of specific information domains that may require special attention, such as personal health information and financial data [11].
- *Methodologies.* There is a need for methodologies aimed at better understanding how people currently practice personal information management. There is also a need for methodologies to understand better the efficacy of proposed PIM solutions [10].

As we strive to improve PIM, we must never lose sight of the “personal” in personal information management. We, as individuals, don’t manage information for its own sake. Information is a means to an end – whether the end is a completion of a well-defined task or something less well understood and harder to articulate (“just because I like looking at it” or “I like knowing it’s there”). It is our hope that this workshop brings people closer to completing their personal information tasks.

Organizers

PIM 2008 is made possible thanks to the efforts of researchers active in the PIM community.

Jaime Teevan, a researcher in the Context, Learning, and User Experience for Search (CLUES) group at Microsoft Research, Redmond, Washington.

William Jones, a research associate professor in the Information School where he manages the Keeping Found Things Found project (funded by the National Science Foundation <http://kftf.ischool.washington.edu>). The pair has co-edited a special issue on PIM for the CACM [14] and a book on PIM [11].

Considerable organizational support is provided by:

- Ofer Bergman, Submissions chair.
- Danyel Fisher, Review area chair.
- Steve Whittaker, Review area chair.
- Robert G. Capra, Volunteer coordinator.
- Jens Dittrich Web site manager.
- Jacek Gwizdka, Publicity chair.
- Antonella Poggi Local area coordinator.

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