

iChat vs. Skype – The Showdown

Which client will better suit the needs of the Interactive Design faculty?

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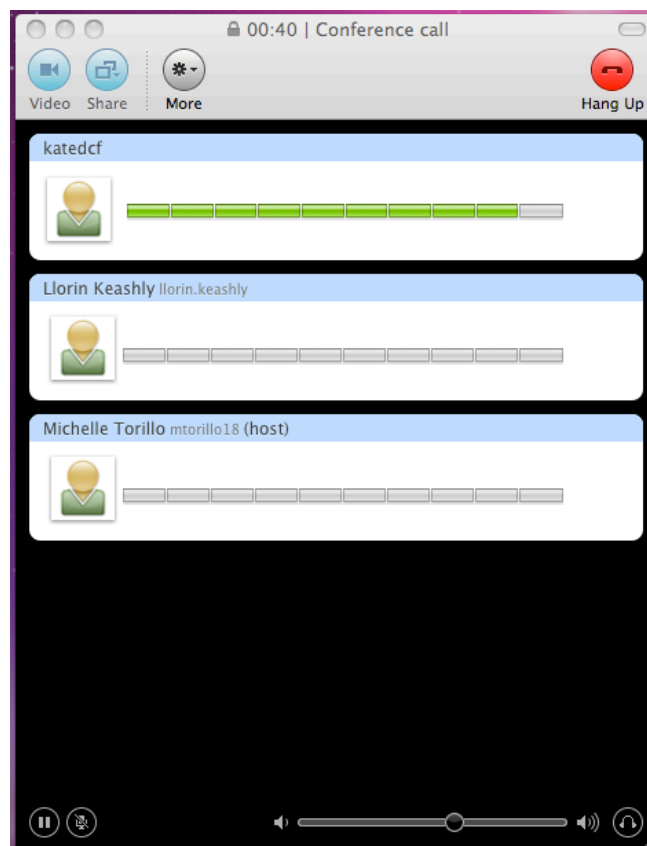
The Interactive Design Department of Capilano University is in a unique situation because many of the faculty are working professionals as well as instructors. This means that they are often not in the same building but still need to find time to have faculty meetings. If they are unable to come to the campus they need to be able to video conference department meetings from home, from the office, or on the go. Since the Interactive Design program is largely Mac based they might consider using iChat for these video conferences. They could also consider using the popular messaging service Skype. Below is a comparison of the two clients and the pros and cons of using them for an Interactive Design department video conference meeting.

iChat:

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
High quality video chatting.	Not PC compatible.	Creation of an app for smartphones.	Skype
Can video chat with 4 people at a time.	Calling landlines not supported.	In-chat messaging and whiteboard.	To talk to a non-Mac user you must seek out different software.
Pre-installed with Mac OS X.	Interface not customizable.	Drag and drop file sharing within video chat.	
Can screen share in one on one chat	Document sharing is not intuitive.	Parental controls.	
Supports MobileMe, AOL, Jabber and Gmail accounts.			

Skype (for Mac):

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Easy to install, setup and use	Multi-chat with video not supported. (Supported on PC)	Add support for multi-chat with video. (Supported on PC)	iChat (for Mac users)
Can call landlines.	Low quality video.	Multiple user screen sharing.	AOL
Mac and PC compatible.	No screen sharing with multiple users.	In-chat messaging and whiteboard. (Supported on PC)	Windows Live Messenger
Can send files to all chat members at once.			



When a third user is added to a video chat in Skype for Mac it becomes an audio only call.

Overall Comparison:

Features	iChat	Skype (for Mac)	The Winner
Usability/Interface	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Buttons are in places you would expect to find them. ▪ Menu bar at the top is consistent with other Mac applications. ▪ Had to change Server Settings in Preferences to use Gmail account. ▪ Had to Google how to add multiple users to a video-chat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sign-in takes far too long. ▪ Buttons are in places you would expect to find them. 	Skype
Video Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low 	iChat
File Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Easy to see a file – drag and drop it in and the user’s thumbnail becomes a preview of the file. ▪ Can also transmit the file to all users in the chat. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Right-click on any user and choose “Send File.” 	iChat
Operating System Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mac OS X 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mac OS X & Windows 	Skype
Mobile App	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unavailable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Available 	Skype
Account creation required?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No, user can use AOL, Jabber, MobileMe or Gmail account. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Yes, user must create a Skype account. 	iChat



iChat Video Quality.



Skype for
PC Video
Quality
(comparable
to Skype for
Mac)

Conclusion:

For the average Mac user iChat provides a more pleasant experience than Skype for Mac. If the user only needs to chat with other Mac users then it is the software of choice. It works well and the video and audio quality is very high. If the need to talk to users on PCs then they will have to forgo some video and audio quality and use Skype.

Although Skype for Mac has many features that iChat does not, it is missing the one feature that the Interactive Design faculty needs most – multi-chat video conferencing. If Skype for Mac had all the features of Skype for PC then it would be the clear winner. Until Skype for Mac is updated the Interactive Design faculty should use iChat for their meetings.