Yahoo! Messenger 10: Basics of Use

A Guide by Kathleen Conley
Introduction

The newest version of Yahoo! Messenger has a wide array of features and capabilities, from instant messaging to audio chatting to video conferencing. While the functions of Yahoo! Messenger (YM) are relatively simple to use, one must first understand the basics of the system. This guide will give users an overview of the program and will also answer frequently asked questions. During the development of this guide, YM users like you have given their opinion of what aspects of YM were most important to them, as well as problems that they felt existed with previous guides and tutorials. With this revised guide, I hope to provide you with a simultaneously brief yet comprehensive summary of the basic properties of YM, so that you can waste no time in getting started, but also feel free to reference this material if you need further help or if you forgot how to do something!

Note: these instructions apply to YM use for PCs.

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Installation

The latest version of YM is Yahoo! Messenger 10 Beta, and can be downloaded for free from the following website: http://messenger.yahoo.com/winbeta. Although portions of this guide can also be used for earlier versions of YM, some features described here, such as video calling, are not available in these versions.

After visiting the web site listed above, simply click the button that says “Download Now.”

After following the on-screen instructions, YM will be successfully installed on your computer. An icon should now appear on your desktop or in the Quick Launch Toolbar by the start button. Note: it is advised that you restart your computer after installing; this will solve most initial technical difficulties.

Clicking on either of these icons will bring up the sign-in screen, and you are ready to customize YM!
Set-Up and Personalization

Signing In

If you are not already signed in, YM will look like the figure to the left when you launch the program.

You must first input your Yahoo! ID and Password. Notice the check box that says “Sign in automatically.” If you select this option, you will be signed in immediately after you turn on your computer. This option is convenient, but is not recommended if you are using a shared computer. (Also notice the language drop-down menu; this is a new feature of Yahoo! Messenger 10 Beta, which is now available in 16 different languages.)

After signing in, the YM application will look similar to the figure to the right.

Adding Friends and Contacts

After the installation process, YM will probably have added the contents of your address book if you specified this option. However, addresses may still be added. Clicking on the Contacts tab at the top of the screen will reveal a drop down menu. The option Add a Contact will add a person to your list of friends for YM, after that person accepts your friend request (instant messaging with friends will be discussed in the next section). The option Add an Address Book Contact will add a contact that can be used with your Yahoo! e-mail address. Selecting Import Contacts... will allow you to add in all the contacts saved with a previous e-mail address.

Personalizing Yahoo! Messenger

There are several options available to personalize YM. The first is creating a display image that will be seen by your friends when you instant message (IM) them. To change your display image, click on the Messenger tab at the top and select My Display Image from the drop-down menu. A
box (shown in the figure to the right) will pop up next to the rectangular YM menu. From this menu, you can choose to not share your display image when you instant message, you can browse for images located on your computer by clicking the Select... button, or you can share a Yahoo! Avatar that you have previously created. For this guide, a picture of the character Rhoda from the film “The Bad Seed” will be used as the display image.

Another way to personalize YM is to change the skin, or the color and design, of the YM menus. To do this, click on the Skins button at the very top of the main menu next to the Minimize, Maximize, and Close buttons:

A new feature of YM is the Status Update, which is located next to your display image. You can type into this text box to give your friends one-line updates about your mood or what you are doing.

To view updates sent by your friends, click on the Y! Updates tab. This will display the updates in a format similar to that in the figure to the right.
Instant Messaging

Basic Functions and Usage

The instant messaging capability of YM is its most fundamental process. Starting an instant message conversation is really quite simple. First, check the Friends section of the main menu. If your friends are online and available to chat, their name and picture will be clear and in color; if not, their display image will be faded or in grayscale.

To start an instant message conversation, click on the name of a person in your Friends list and click on the downward arrow on the right. Click on the first choice labeled Instant Message...

This will bring up a new window that looks like the one below:

Your friend’s display image will be on the top and yours at the bottom. In order to send a message, type in the bottom text box next to your picture and press Send. This text should appear in the larger white text box next to your friend’s display image. Congratulations, you have sent your first instant message!
Here is an example of a conversation between two people using YM:

1. ktconley0524: Hi Travis!
2. Travis Hlavaty: Hey Katie! What's going on?
3. ktconley0524: I just got back from work, and now I'm doing homework. What about you?
4. Travis Hlavaty: I'm studying for calc test next week, and later I'm going to watch Glee.
5. ktconley0524: Yeah, a lot of people at MSU watch Glee. Who's your favorite character?
6. Travis Hlavaty: Finn Hudson
7. ktconley0524: Who is he again?
8. Travis Hlavaty: One of the main male character
9. ktconley0524: Duh. I mean is he the football player or the teacher or what?
10. Travis Hlavaty: He's the football player
11. ktconley0524: Oh, ok. That's what I thought. I like the teacher who has OCD.
12. Travis Hlavaty: She's an administrative person
13. ktconley0524: Oh, whatever, I've only seen the show a few times. I just like how she's always cleaning things. Anyway, gotta go. Talk to you later! 😊
14. Travis Hlavaty: Bye! 😊
Associated Features

There are other special tools and tricks that can be used to create a personalized environment for your instant messages. The tool bar icons above the input message box allow you to:

1. Insert an emoticon (smiley that expresses your mood)
2. Send an audible (playful animations with sound—for when you’re bored)
3. Edit text
4. Send a “buzz” (used to alert your friend if they are taking too long to respond)
5. Attach files

These icons are shown on the figure on the previous page.

You can also change the environment in which you instant message. By clicking on the IMVironments tab at the top of the instant message window, you can insert different backgrounds, several of which are animated. An example of an IMVironment is “Autumn Leaves” shown below:
Video and Voice Calls

The ability to make video and voice calls is the newest feature of YM. In order to make these types of calls, both users must possess a working microphone and webcam. Voice calls are rather easy to make. Simply click the button that says **Voice Call** with the microphone icon. This will start a PC-to-PC voice call between your computer and your friend’s computer. If your friend is the one making the call, you will have the option to accept or ignore the call. A box will pop-up in the bottom-right corner of your screen and you will be able to click a button for your choice.

Video calls are made in a very similar way. First click the **Video Call** button with a picture of a webcam that is to the left of the voice call button. Your friend will then have the option to accept or ignore your call. If your call is accepted, your computer may take a while to initialize the video, but eventually it will connect and you should be able to see and hear your friend!
The image of your friend will appear in the larger portion of the screen, and the image captured by your webcam will be in a small box in the lower right hand corner. You can move this box to any of the other corners, or you can place your webcam image side-by-side with your friend’s, and they will be the same size. Or, you can choose to make your friend’s image cover the whole screen. This will produce the best effect, because it will really feel like you are peering through a window into their world.

Endnotes

Yahoo! Messenger is an underestimated social tool in many respects. Users can talk with each other through streaming video and simultaneously send files back and forth between them. As a college student, the functions that YM has provided have allowed me to keep in touch with and actually see my friends and family, who live far away. As a writing student, this tool has also helped me edit and collaborate on projects. For instance, when I am video chatting with my friend who attends the University of Michigan, I am able to tell him about a paper that I am currently writing. I can then attach a file and send it to him instantly, and he can read my paper. We can then discuss it immediately afterwards, through either text or audio. The telephone or email could certainly not accomplish these tasks with the same rapidity as Yahoo! Messenger. This is just one example of how social networking tools are making the world a little bit smaller.

I hope that this guide has given you a good understanding of the basic tools available for use in Yahoo! Messenger, and has helped to answer any questions you may have had about how to use the program. The best way to learn about YM is to experience it, so play around with all of the different options that are available. It won’t take very long for you to realize the impact that instant messaging will make on your methods of communication.