

# Empathy IM client: findings from usability testing

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“ Fundamentals are there but it needs to be bit more user friendly. I am a comfortable user who has been doing it for years [using Ubuntu and Pidgin] but I felt lost from time to time. Not always what I expected.”

# Methodology

- Usability testing with 16 participants
- Tested 2 versions: Ubuntu (5 participants) and Empathy (11 participants)
- Main tasks:
  - Configure an account and set-up preferences
  - Engage with contacts
  - Text chat and video chat
  - Send and receive a file
  - Create a group
  - Quit

# Executive summary

Participants responded positively to Empathy, stating that it is a useful and relatively easy application to work with. They were clearly excited about features like tabs and calendar.

Where problems occurred:

- Participants did not always understand the implications of the network paradigm
- They expected information to be organised around people
- They needed more feedback on what the system was doing and if they had done the right action

# Executive summary

Participants were delighted by many of the features of Empathy. They responded enthusiastically to the following features and functionalities:

**Tabs:** All the participants were thrilled by the tabs that allowed them to have parallel conversations with their contacts. They also were surprised and impressed by the interaction design of the tabs and the facility with which they could separate them and put them back together.

**Calendar to find past conversations:** Again, all the participants found the search calendar for past conversations exciting and very intuitive. They found the possibility of searching for specific conversations on specific very useful and sensible.

# Critical issues

Participants pointed to a range of usability issues from critical to minor. A critical usability issue is an issue that prevents users to conduct a task to its completion or would eventually discourage the use of Empathy. We have found 5 critical issues:

**Issue 1:** When participants signed up, they often didn't know if they were signed up or not because the screen showed confusing messages.

**Issue 2:** Participants did not know how their personal information appeared to others. The only information they saw about themselves was if they were available or not.

# Critical issues continued

**Issue 3:** Participants were not able to figure out how to chat with more than one person. They thought they had to invite their contacts to join a group but then, could not figure out which server they should chose.

**Issue 4:** Participants did not understand what was happening when they received a file. They did not understand the icon and the flashing behaviour.

**Issue 5:** Many participants did not understand the network paradigm and were confused between actions that affected all networks, like status, and actions that affected only one network like changing alias.

# Medium issues

Next, there were issues participants contributed that were not critical. They didn't prevent them from accomplishing what they intended to do, but did reduce significantly their enjoyment of Empathy as interactions were sometimes difficult, at other times annoying. We call them medium importance issues.

**Issue 6:** Participants expected the organisation of the information to be contextual, that is, the architecture of information to be structured around people. For example, they expected to see everything that has to do with a contact under the name of that contact; everything that has to do with themselves under personal information. As a consequence, when they were looking for specific information they were lost and had to open many tabs.

**Issue 7:** Sometimes, the process of doing a change involves more work than necessary. For example, to correct an error to a network when authentication has failed, participants needed to add a new network and go through the same process again. They could not instead modify the fields display on the screen.

# Medium issues continued

**Issue 8:** Participants were puzzled by certain words used in Empathy. They were not sure what an 'alias' or an 'identifier' was, for instance. This could, eventually, compromise their use of Empathy.

# Minor issues

Several minor issues and bugs that could be easily fixed such as buttons missing or obscure terminology have also been picked up by participants. They have been grouped into:

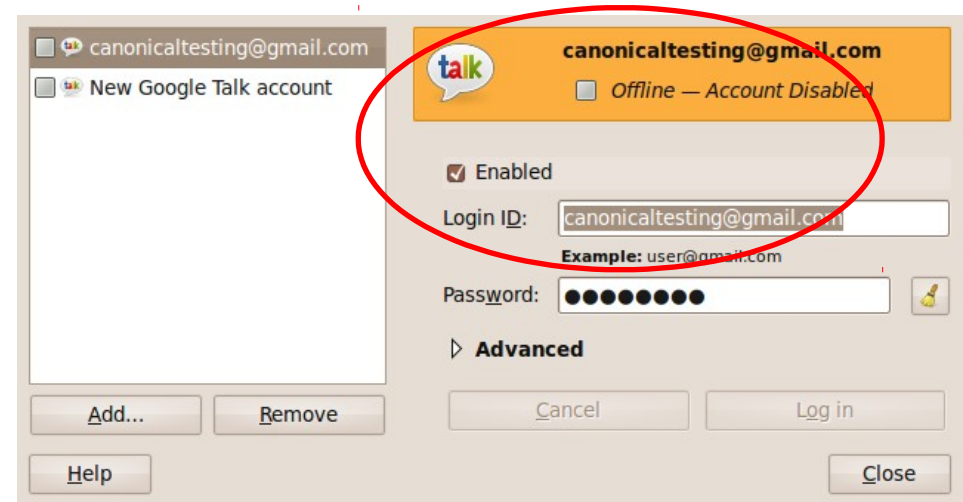
- Getting Started
- Communicating personal information
- Interacting with others

Finally, there were a short wish list participants have proposed, options or functionalities they would like to see in Empathy that would make their experience more complete.

# Getting started

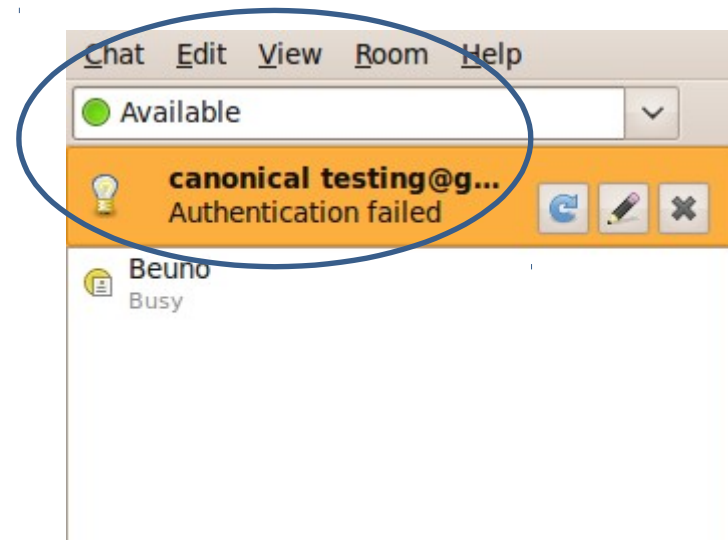
# Status unclear

Participants were confused with apparently contradictory messages like the account being disabled but the enabled button being selected.



# Account failed but participant is available online

Participants were confused by the contradictory messages regarding their status. In this example, the participant does not understand the impact of failing authentication on his ability to be available on the network.



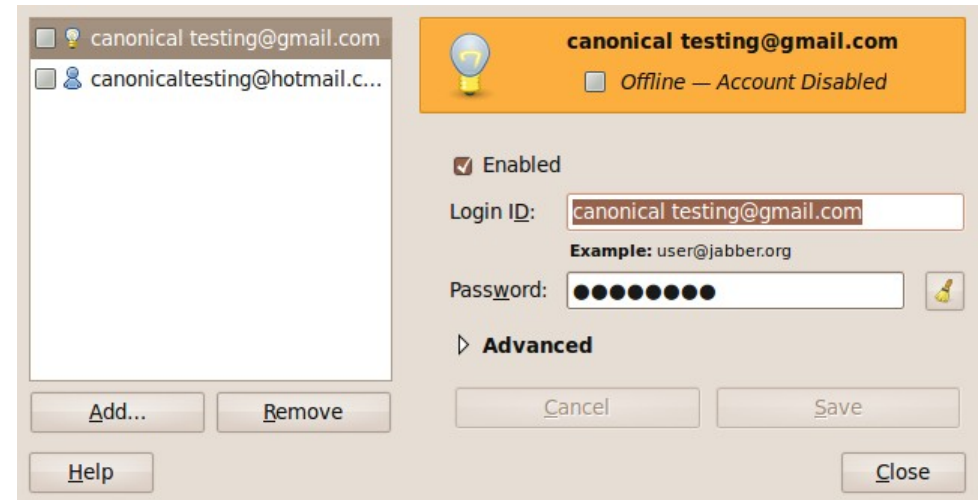
# Recommendation

Provide clear and coherent feedback on users' status.

# Participants did not know what went wrong with their account set up

Participants are informed that their account is disabled. They didn't know what this implied. They did not know what exactly went wrong and how they should fix it.

A few participants ignored the message and set their status available thinking that they were connected.

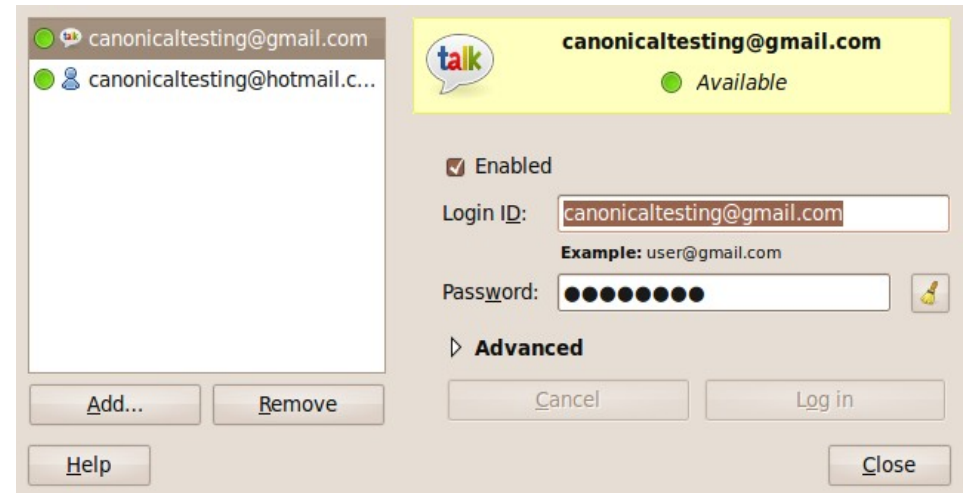


# Recommendation

During account set up, let users know in an error message what went wrong and how they can fix it.

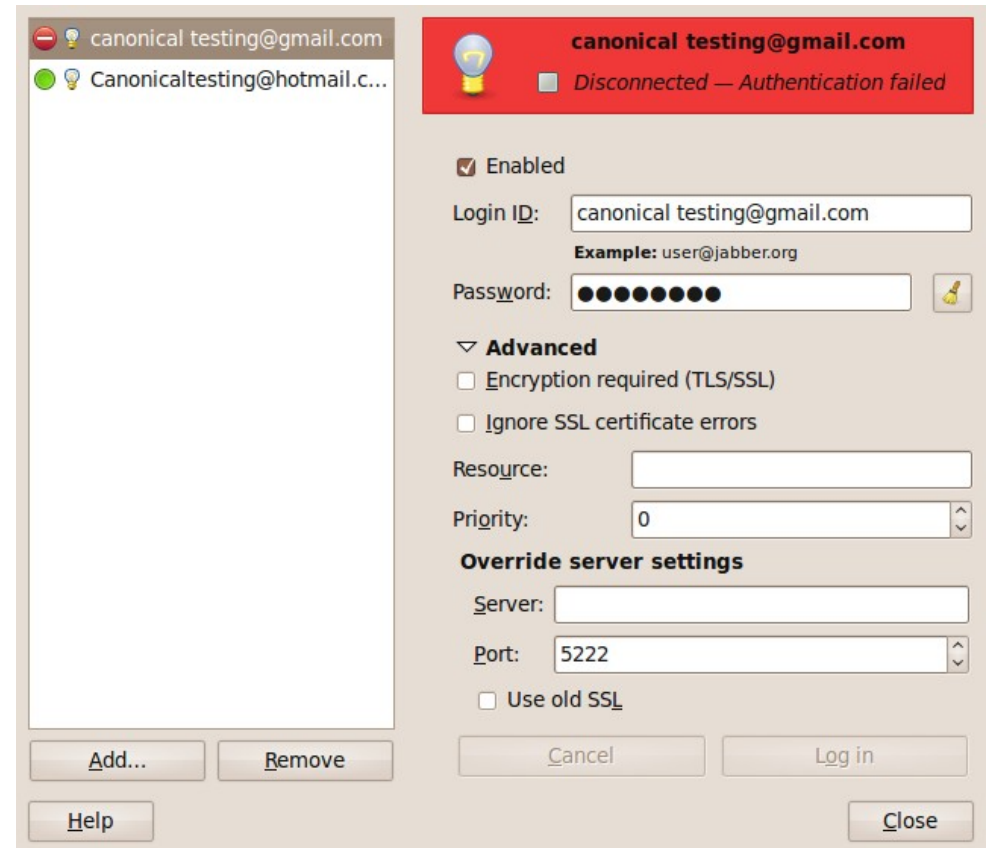
# Status for all networks

A few participants were not sure if their available status applied to all their networks.



# Cannot edit the network field

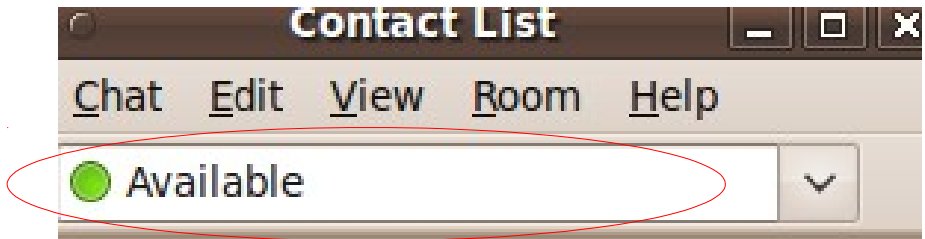
Participants could not edit the log-in id when they realised there was a problem with their account. They needed to add the network as a new network.



# Communicating personal information

# Identity information

Participants want to see how their information will appear to others



'Available' at the top looks like a filter.  
Some participants were not sure what it represents.

Participants wanted to know if their camera was on or off.

# Identity information

“I can't see me that worries me because I don't know exactly how I am being seen or not seen. It is important that they know I am available I can't assume that because I see Jenny that she can see me.”

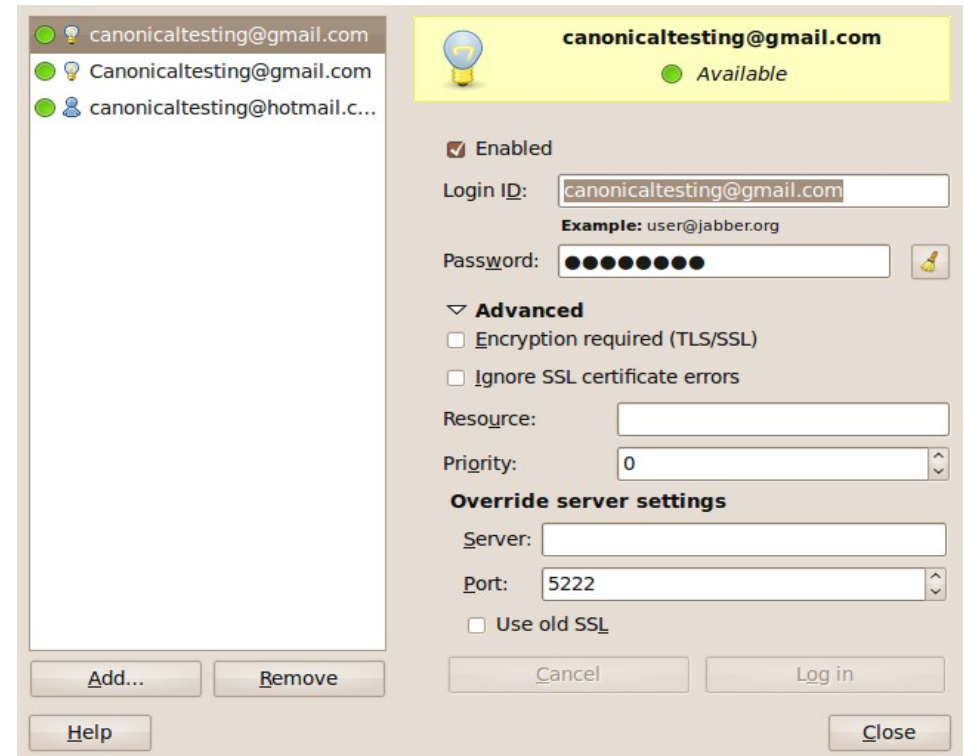
“I would like to see my picture and my name. I used 2 different name and would like to know how my name is displayed. I don't know how to check which name is in use!”

# Recommendation


Create a general area that shows user information at the top. Include information like alias, status, picture, camera setting and camera status.

# Display of user information

Participants want to choose their names and see how and where it is displayed. They can't find where to do it.



# Display of user information

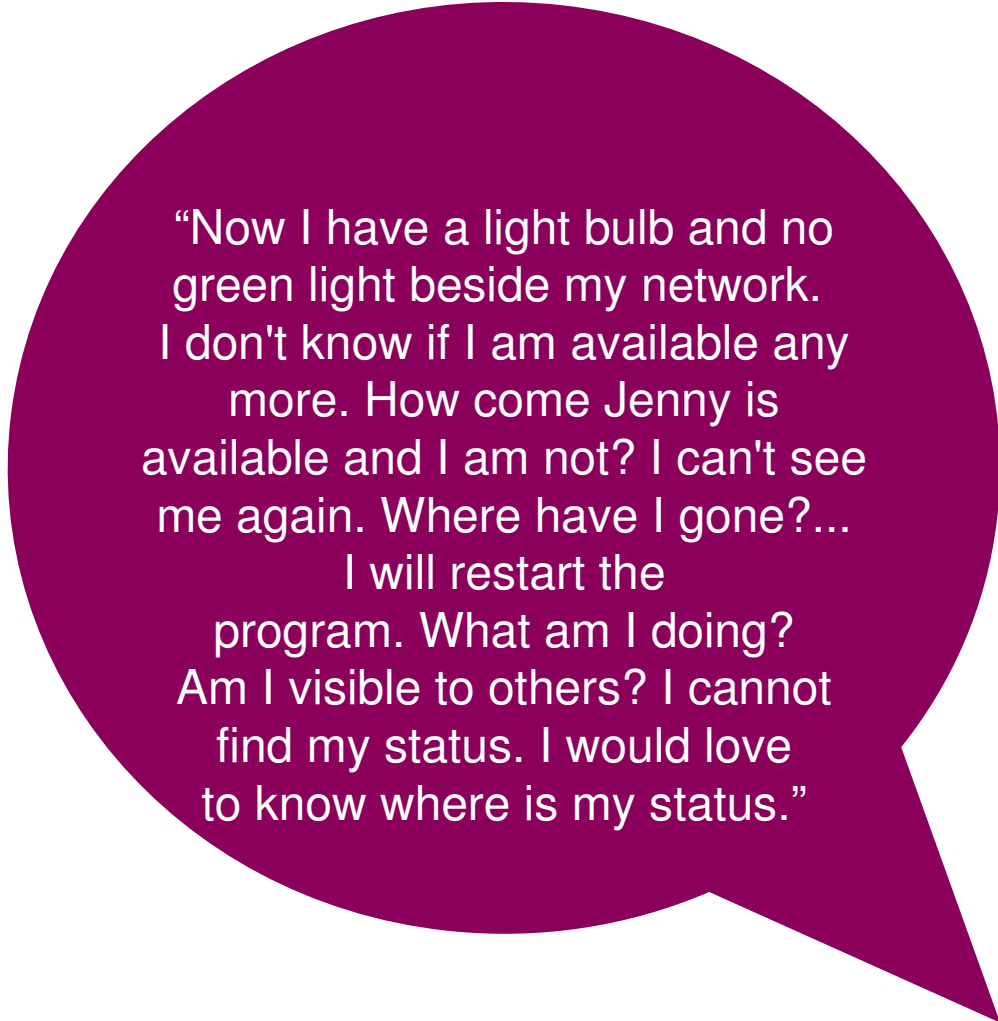


“I'm not sure what I'm doing. I cannot fill in my name as I want to be shown. I expected it to show somewhere or even previous names I've used. I looked under Personal Information. It shows the second account gmail. I changed the alias to Hannah but I don't see what's happening or what I'm doing.”

# Recommendation

Provide a view of how names are being used with contacts, perhaps in the personal information window.

# Showing me

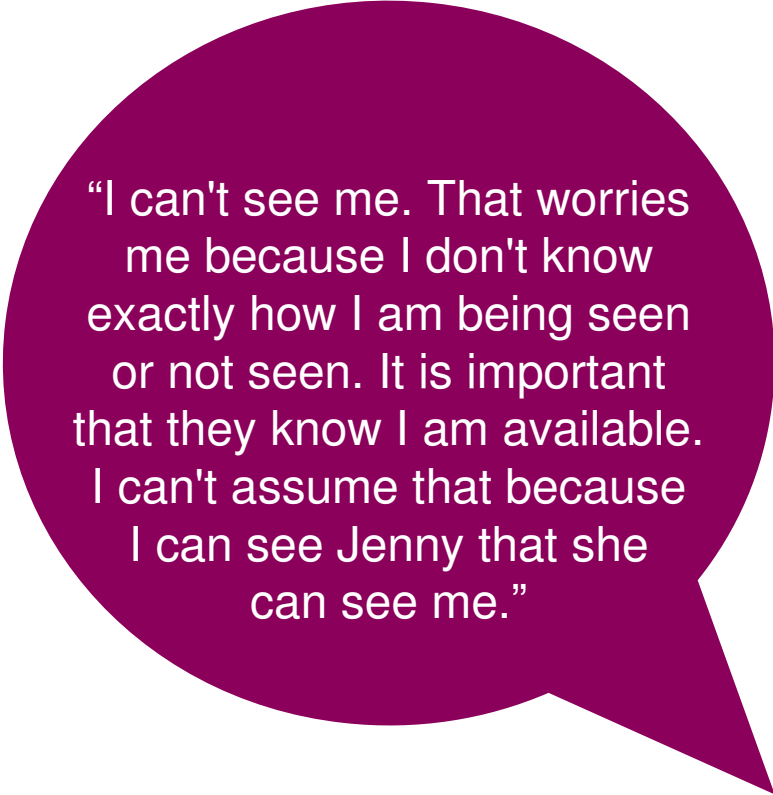


“Now I have a light bulb and no green light beside my network. I don't know if I am available any more. How come Jenny is available and I am not? I can't see me again. Where have I gone?... I will restart the program. What am I doing? Am I visible to others? I cannot find my status. I would love to know where is my status.”

# Showing me

Status icon is inconsistent and confuses users.

The green light in the menu bar is associated with the system – green means the system is running, it is not associated with the user.

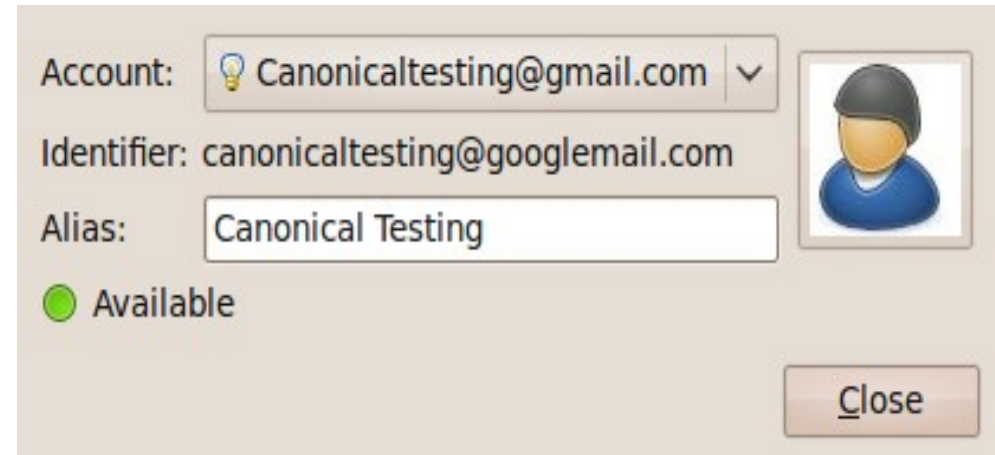


“I can't see me. That worries me because I don't know exactly how I am being seen or not seen. It is important that they know I am available. I can't assume that because I can see Jenny that she can see me.”

# Changing the alias

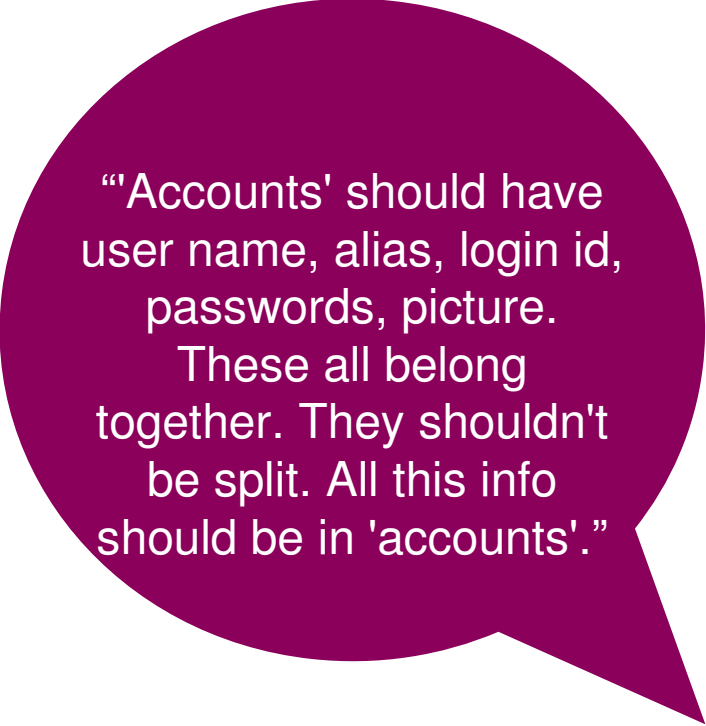
Participants had no problem changing their alias. They assumed that this alias would be changed for all their contacts.

They would have liked to have the option of either changing their alias for all contacts or for selected ones.



# Displaying information around people

Participants expected to find all the information concerning them in one place and the information concerning others accessible through their names.



“Accounts' should have user name, alias, login id, passwords, picture. These all belong together. They shouldn't be split. All this info should be in 'accounts'.”

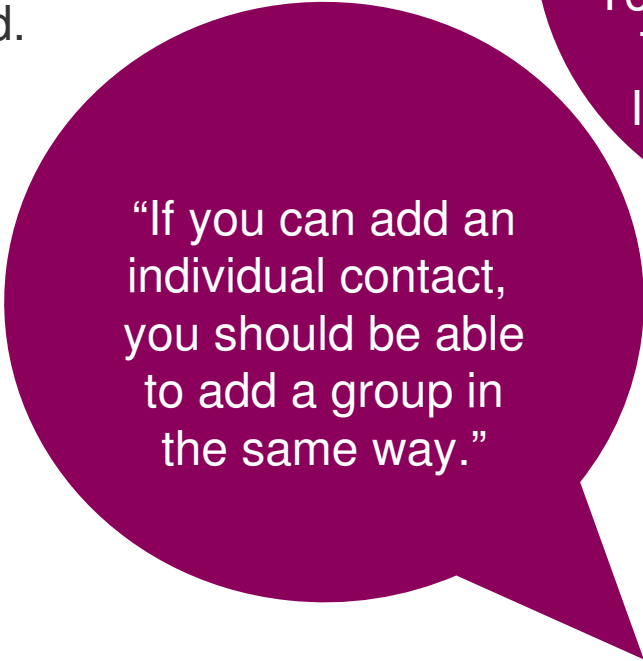
# Recommendation

Regroup the information in accounts and personal information under one header. Similarly, with contacts.

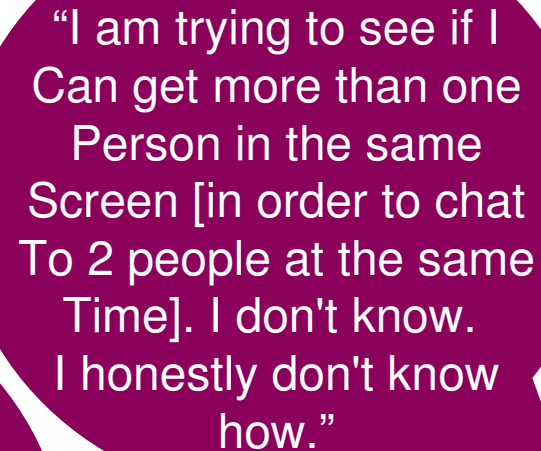
# Interacting with others

# Group chat

Participants were not able to figure out how to do group chats. They had different strategies: drag several people in a conversation window, create a room, create a group. All failed.



“If you can add an individual contact, you should be able to add a group in the same way.”



“I am trying to see if I Can get more than one Person in the same Screen [in order to chat To 2 people at the same Time]. I don't know. I honestly don't know how.”

# Group chat

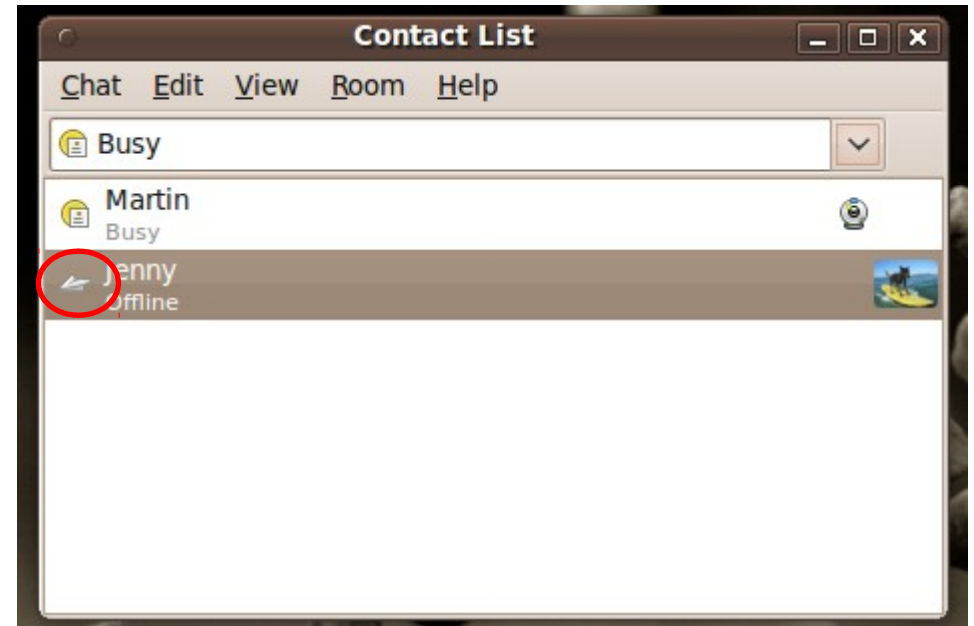
“I could probably create my own room but don't know on what server to put it. I don't know enough to set it up or invite participants. Normally, I would want to just click on several contacts and it would automatically add these people to a group.”

“I have to create a room. I will invite a participant. I invited Jenny. I would have expected Jenny to show up next to Richard [in the room], I would like a confirmation that I sent Jenny an invitation. I don't know if I should invite her again.”

# Sending receiving a file

Many participants had no problem sending a file but:

- They could not figure out how to accept a file that was sent to them. They expected a pop-up asking them to accept the file.
- They did not associate the icon 'arrow' with receiving a file. When the icon started to flash, they didn't know what was happening. They said that a standard icon of a file would be better.
- Even after the contact was offline, the icon continued flashing.



# Sending receiving a file

“Jenny is sending something. What is it? I don't understand the icon. Where is it? It doesn't say in the chat. I would expect it to show in the chat or I want a link in the document or at least the name of the file.”

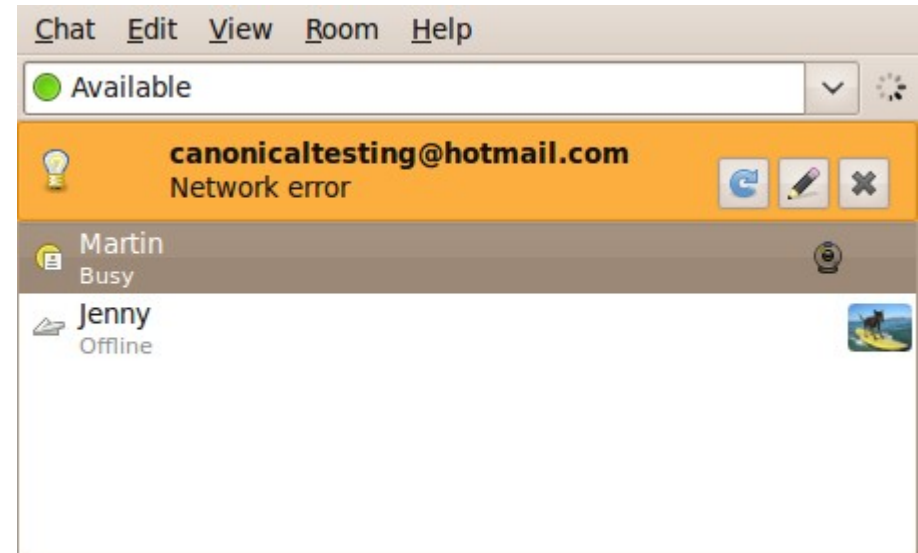
“Flashing is trying to attract my attention. It is a notification but I don't know of what. I must have to acknowledge something somewhere. I expect to get a message that asks me to accept it. I don't see that. Can't find where it is.”

# Recommendation

Create a message notification in which users can directly accept or reject the file. Show in this message the title and type of document. Make the icon representative of the object file.

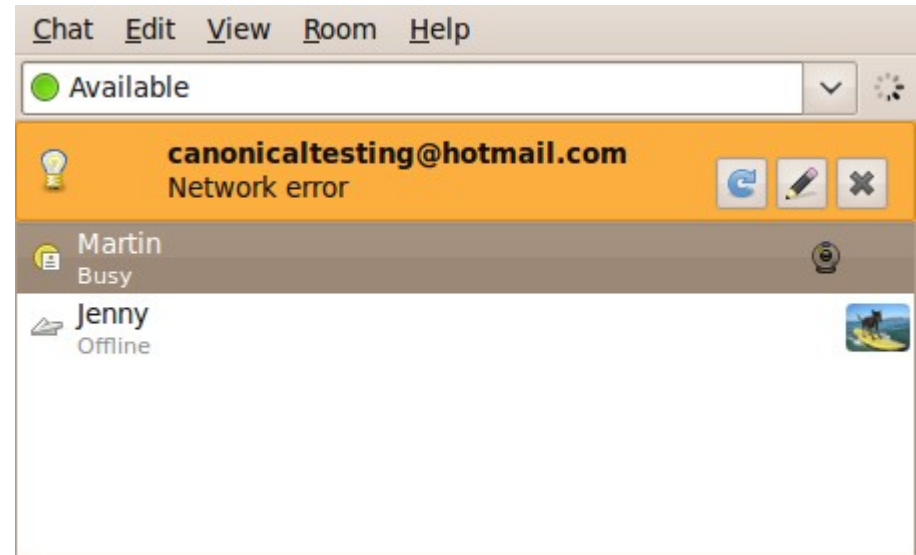
# Finding out where the file is

“Jenny is sending something. What is it? I don't understand the icon. Where is it? It doesn't say in the chat. I would expect it to show in the chat or I want a link in the document or at least the name of the file.”



# Finding out where the file is

Participants expected that everything relating to a contact will be found under that contact.

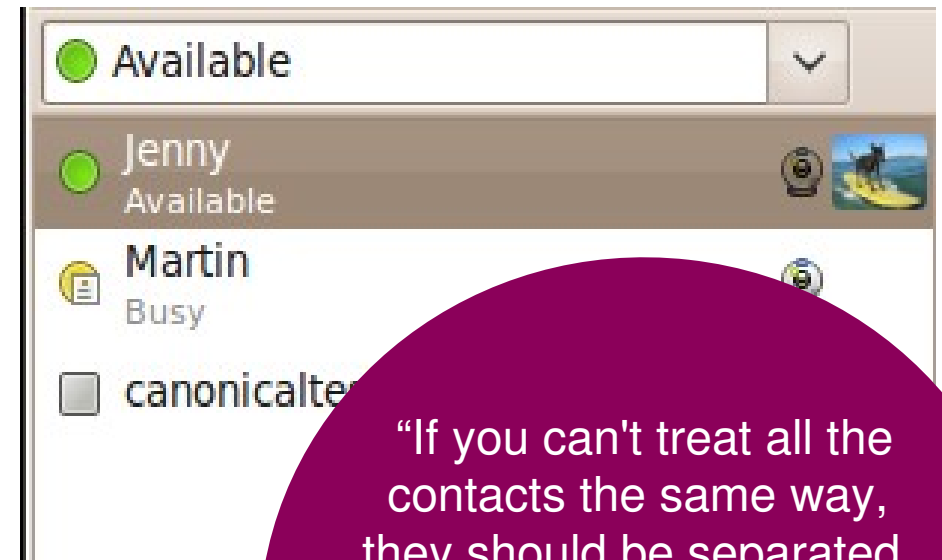


# Recommendation

Simplify the architecture of information and group information around the people.

# Creating groups: Treating groups differently

After trying to create a group and failing, the participant thinks that he can't invite people to join a group if they are not from the same network] Participant suggests that contacts be visibly group if users can't treat all the contacts the same way.



“If you can't treat all the contacts the same way, they should be separated. It would be helpful to make them separate. You could group them by protocols, for example or whatever, when there are conflicting demands.”

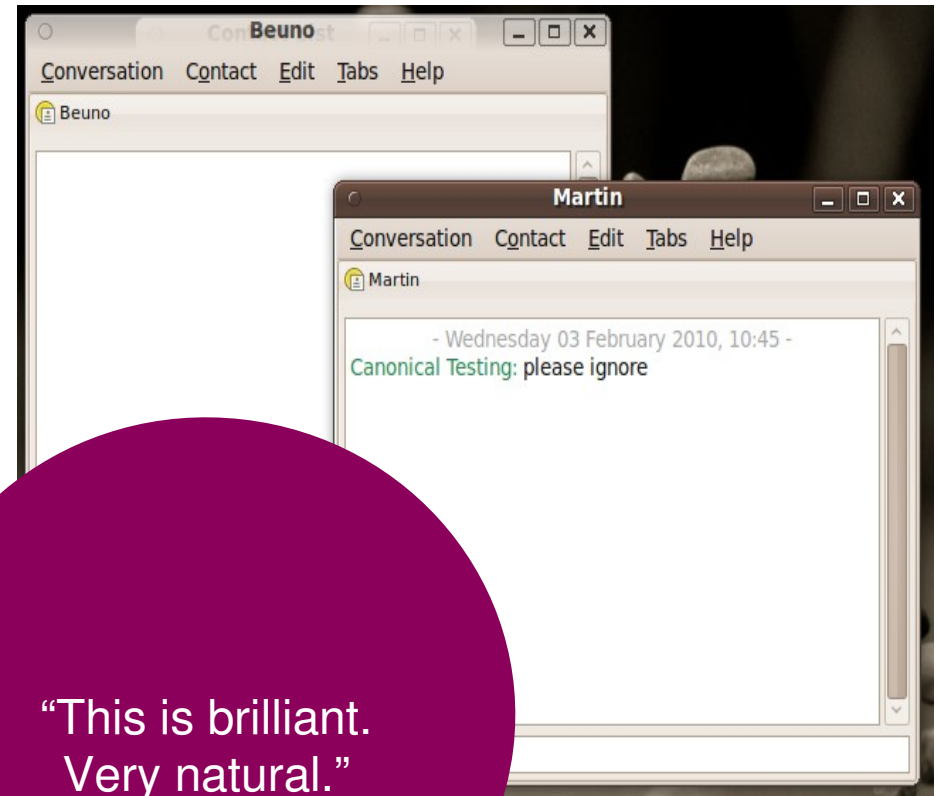
# Recommendation

Group contacts in the contact list following some criteria that apply only to that grouping.

# Tab interaction

Participants liked the way tabs opened when chatting with multiple contacts and how it could be put back.

However, the surface where you can grab the tab to drag it back is quite small. Some participants did not discover it and were unable to join back the tabs.

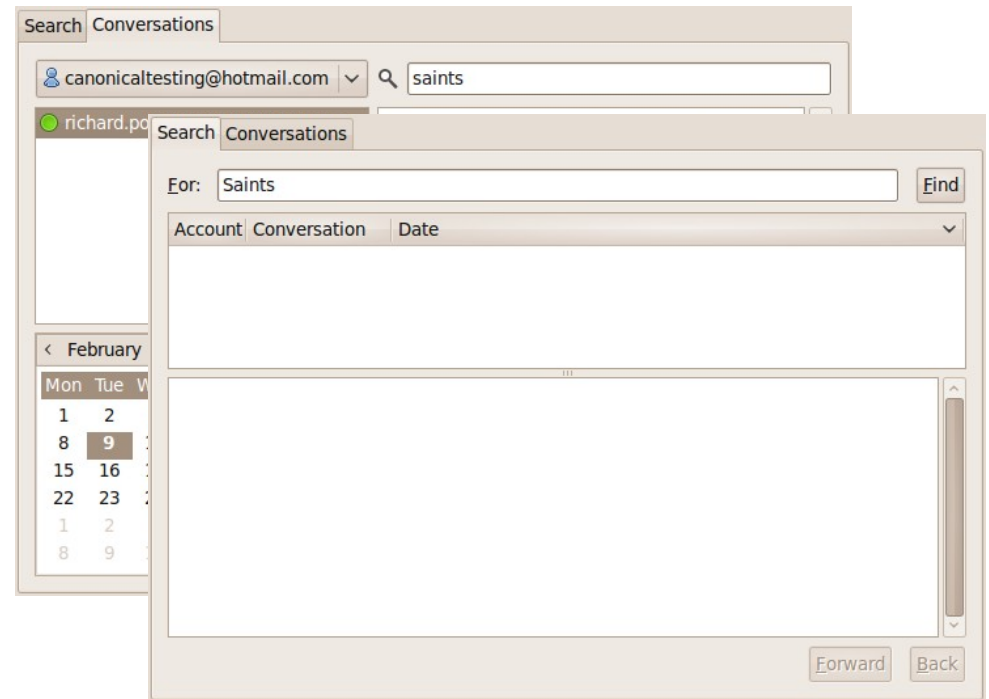


# Recommendation

Enlarge the area where users can grab the tab to join it with another tab.

# What is being searched?

It was not immediately apparent to participants what the search in each instance would be searching

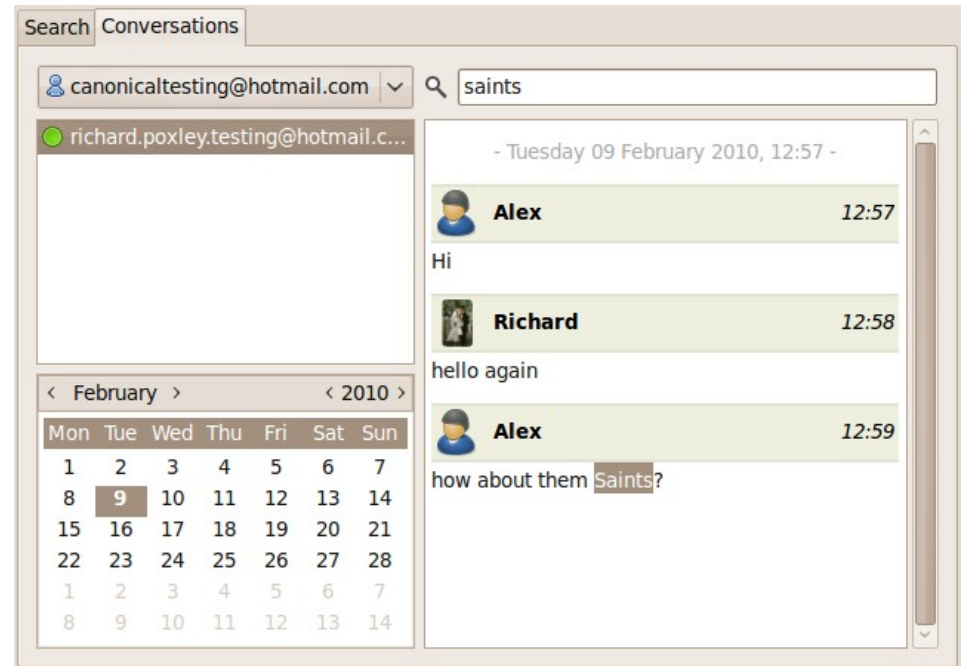


# Recommendation

Indicate clearly the difference between the 2 conversations searches

# Searchable calendar

“This [calendar] is fantastic!”

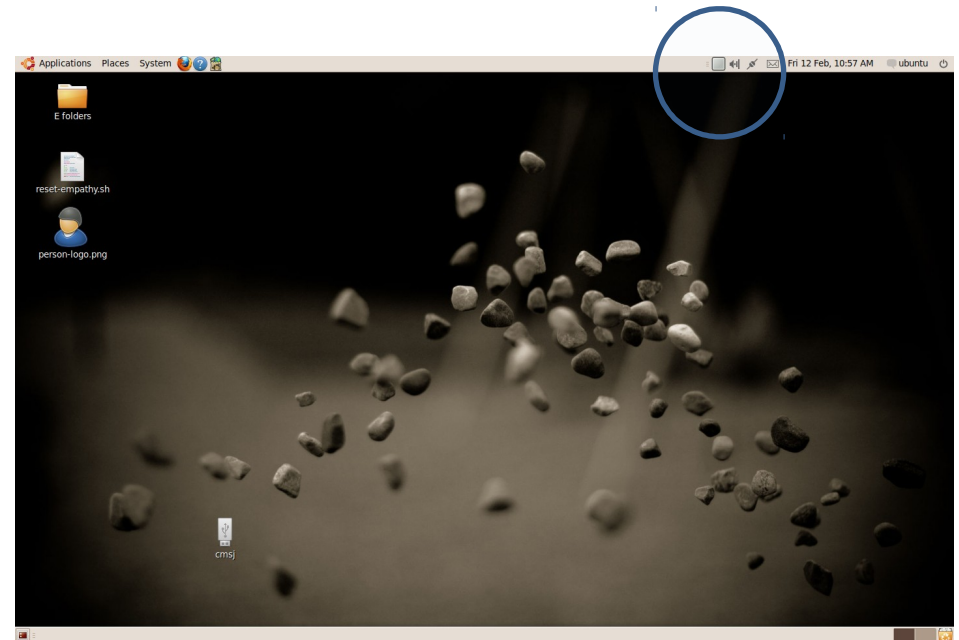


# Minor issues, wish-list and bugs

# Empathy icon in panel is not visible

After participants clicked on Empathy in the applications menu, an icon appears in the top right panel. Because the icon is gray, indicating the offline status, participants do not see it.

They did not know that Empathy had been successfully launched and relaunched it from the menu.



# Recommendation

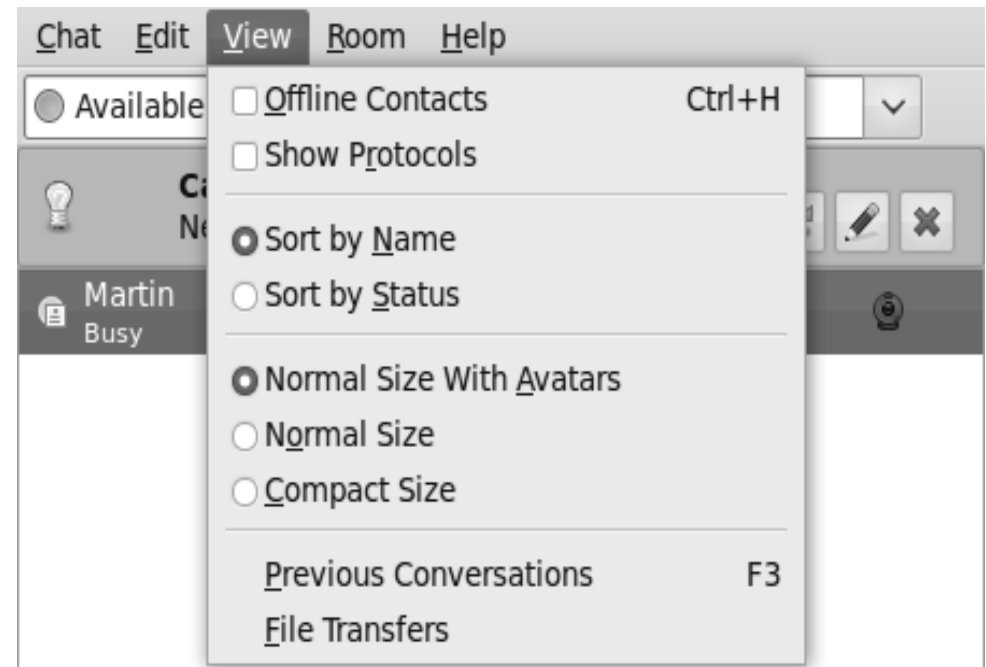
Open the contact list window at the same time the icon appears in the top panel.

# Default settings

Participants did not expect that the default setting for contact was alphabetical.

They expected first, the people available.

They expected that all their contacts, online and offline, would be shown by default.

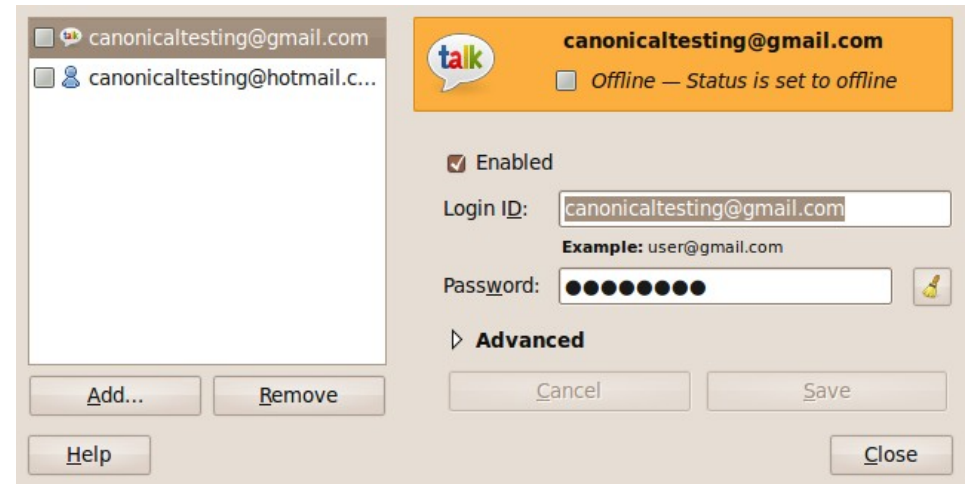


# Recommendation

Make the default setting inclusive and encourage customisation of views.

# Icon offline/ not available looks like a check box

Participants thought that the icon meaning 'offline' or 'not available' was a check-box. They tried to click on it to change their status to available.

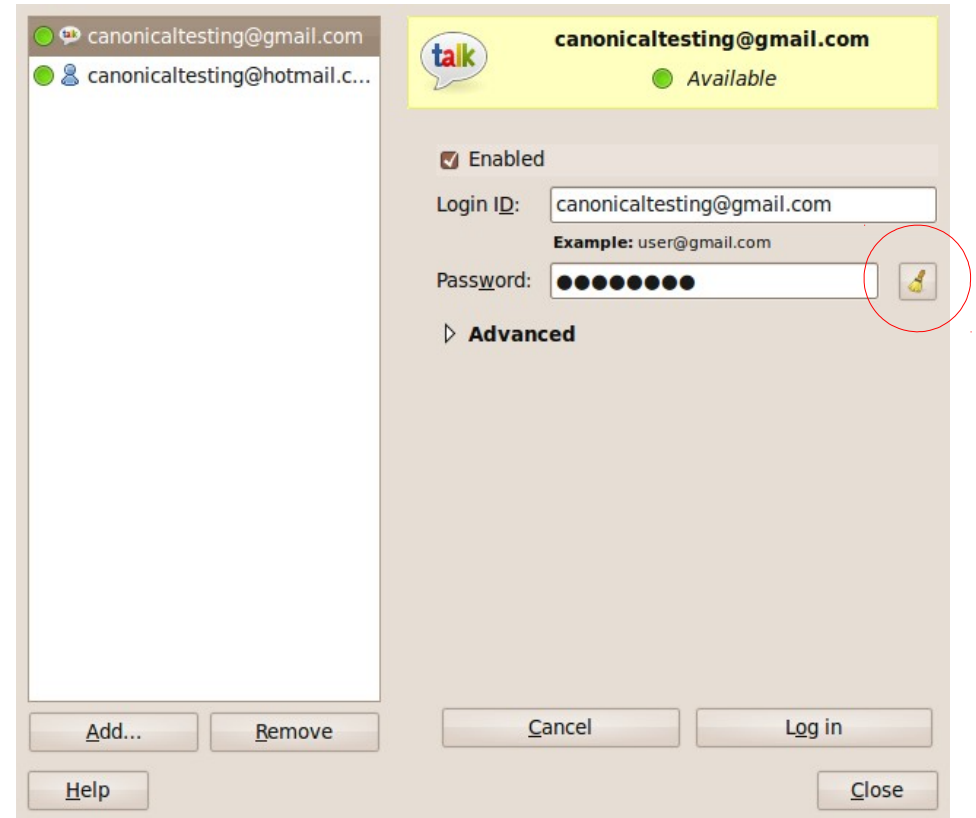


# Recommendation

Change the icon for something that doesn't look actionable but describes a status

# Unfamiliar icon

Participants unfamiliar with Ubuntu did not understand this icon. At the same time, participants did not see its possible use. Generally they just erase and rewrite passwords in its field.

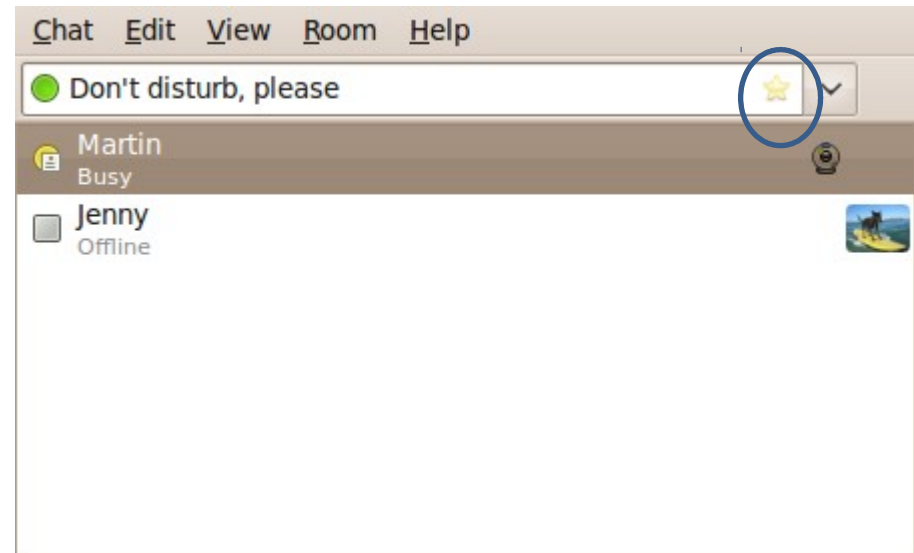


# Recommendation

Use a more evocative icon or indicate its function. Consider not using an icon at all.

# Customize message

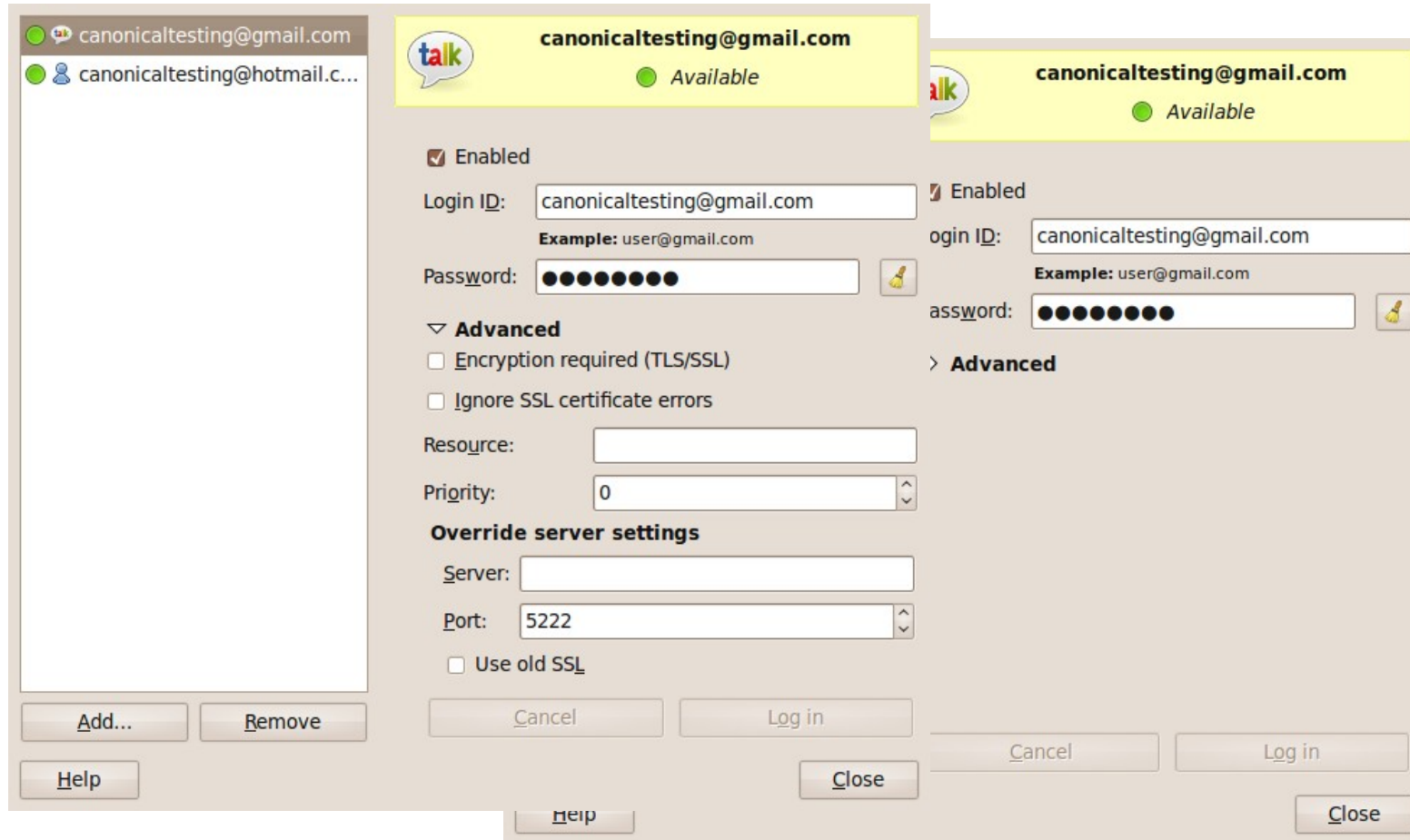
Many participants did not see the star on the status box and, after noticing it, did not understand that it stores the message in the saved presets.



# Recommendation

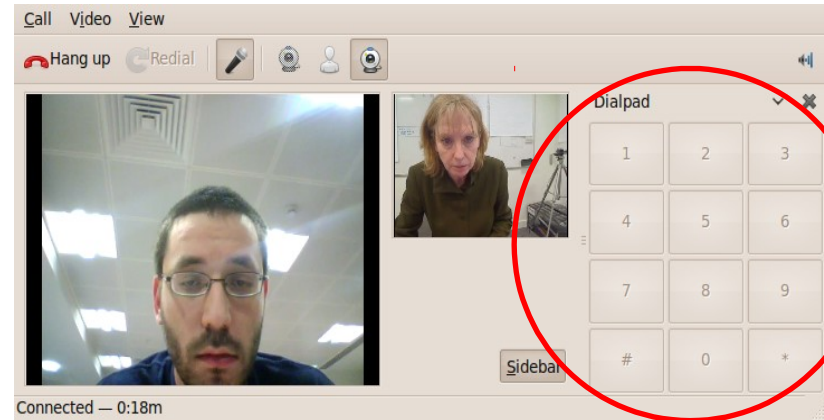
Make the icon more visible with more vivid colours. Indicate the function of the icon with text.

# Tab does not close down when clicking on advanced arrow to close it back down



# Participants don't understand the sidebar

Participants didn't know what the sidebar opening onto a dialling pad was for.

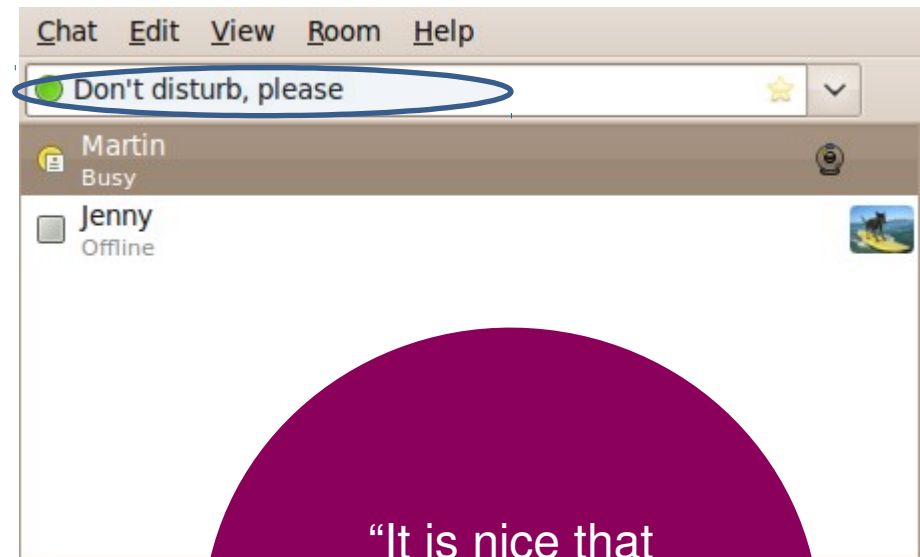


# Recommendation

Explain the use of the sidebar.

# Customize message

A few participants customised the available message with 'do not disturb'. They thought that it is a space like on Facebook to put a 'what's up' sentence rather than a status. This could be confusing for their contacts.



“It is nice that you can put any message you want in here.”

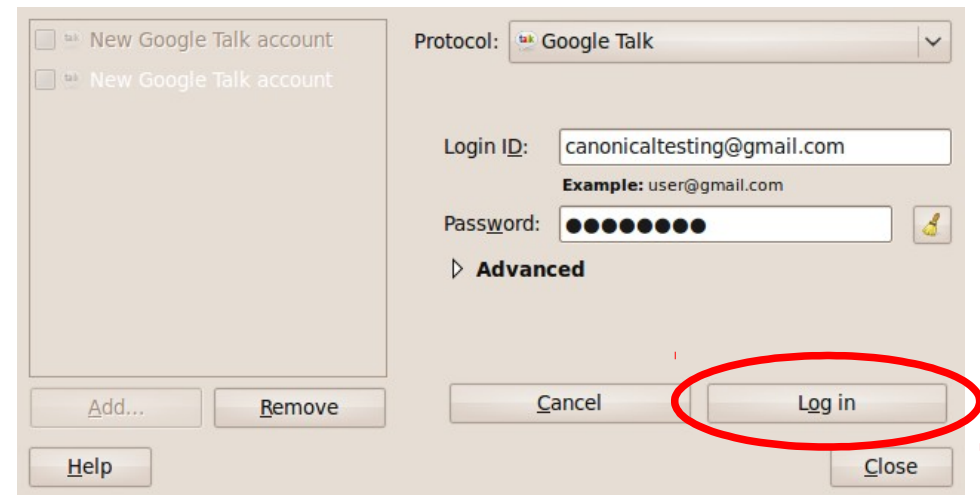
# Recommendation

Provide an explicit area where users can communicate personal messages.

# Inconsistent use of language: Log in or save

When participants create their first account, they have a 'save' button.

When they add a second network, they log in.

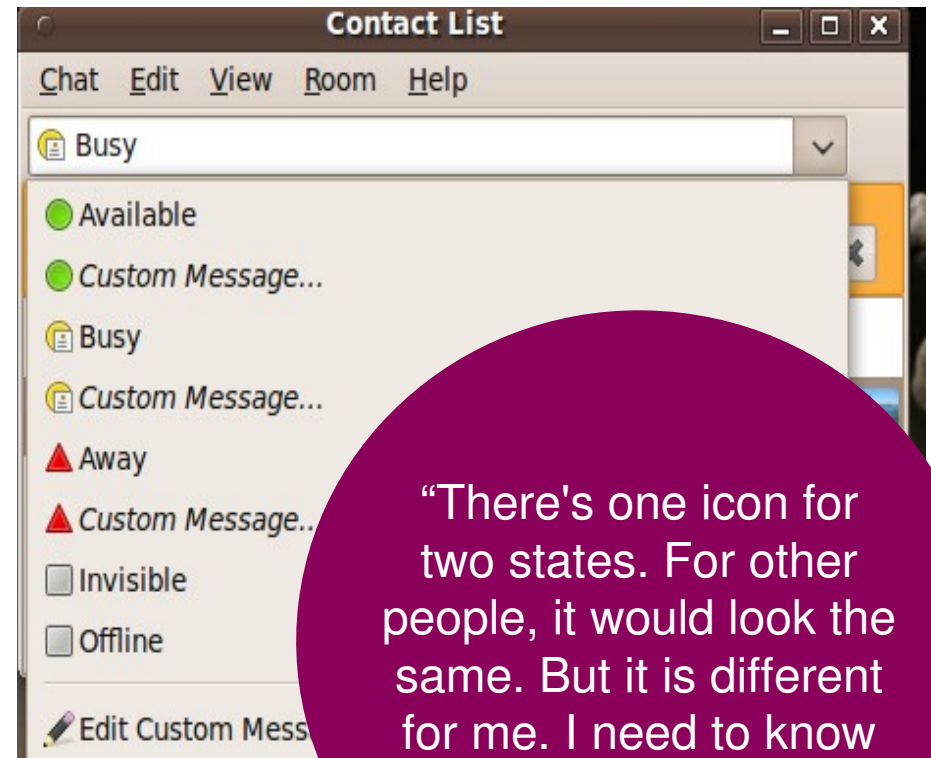


# Recommendation

Unless there is a difference in the user action, use identical wording.

# One icon conveys several meanings

Participants did not understand the invisible/offline icons. They said that the invisible icon is not appropriate to show for others since it would defeat the purpose and it is only for them.



“There's one icon for two states. For other people, it would look the same. But it is different for me. I need to know because I think that I am not signed in.”

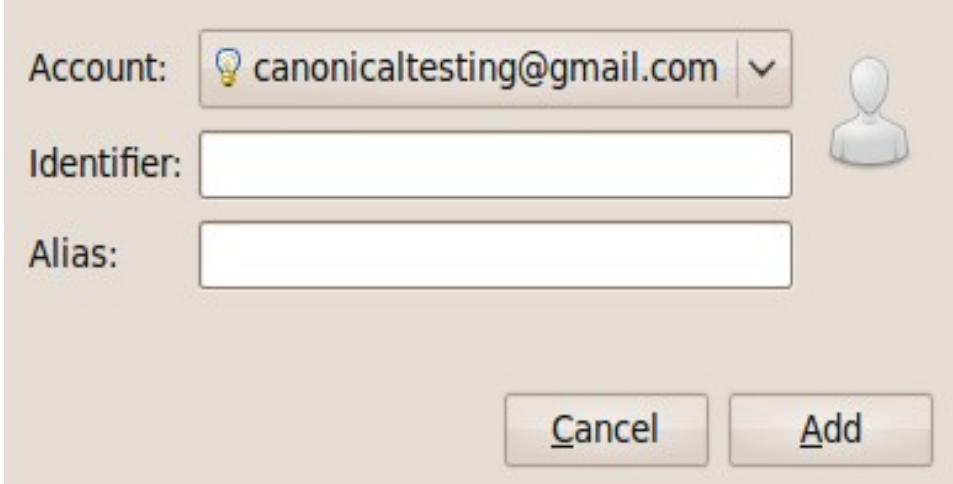
# Recommendation

Use different icons to signal invisible and offline states.

# Adding a contact

When wanting to add a contact, participants did not understand why this screen was presented to them.

They didn't know how to fill it in, especially as the identifier



The screenshot shows a contact addition form with the following elements:

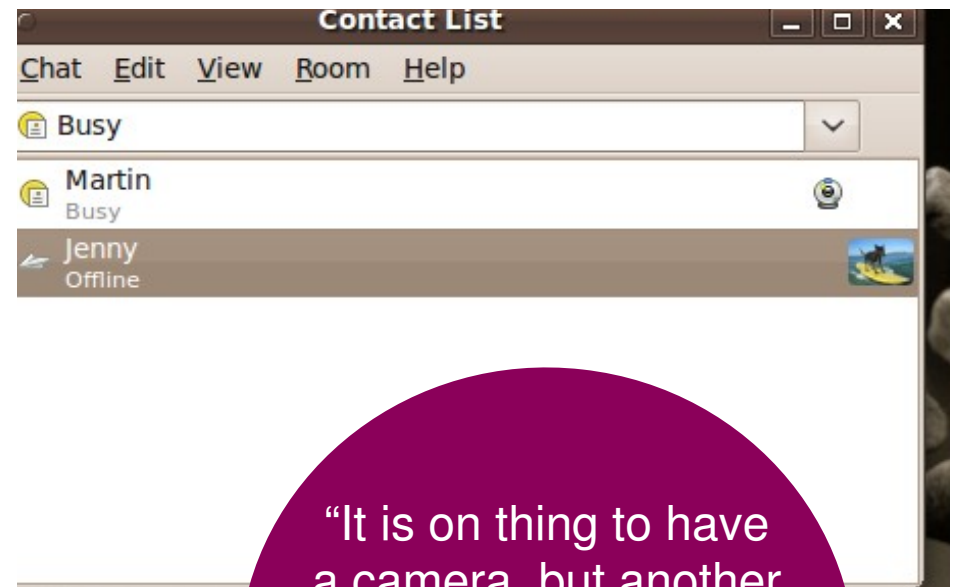
- Account:** A dropdown menu with a lightbulb icon and the text "canonicaltesting@gmail.com" and a downward arrow.
- Identifier:** An empty text input field.
- Alias:** An empty text input field.
- Buttons:** "Cancel" and "Add" buttons at the bottom right.
- Avatar:** A grey person icon on the right side of the form.

# Recommendation

Change the language. Instead of 'identifier' use 'email address'.

# Camera

Icon showing that the contact has a webcam is useful. Would be even better to see if the person is able to use webcam at that time. For example, if they are at work, they can't. The icon should be red or green..



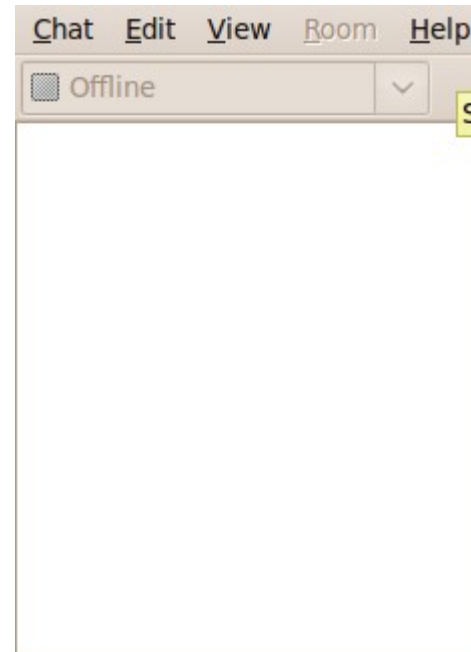
“It is on thing to have a camera, but another to know they want to use it. In the preferences, there is nothing for video or audio.”

## Recommendation

Allow users to set their camera availability. Display beside the contact alias if they are 'camera available' by making the camera icon red or green.

# Button missing beside status box

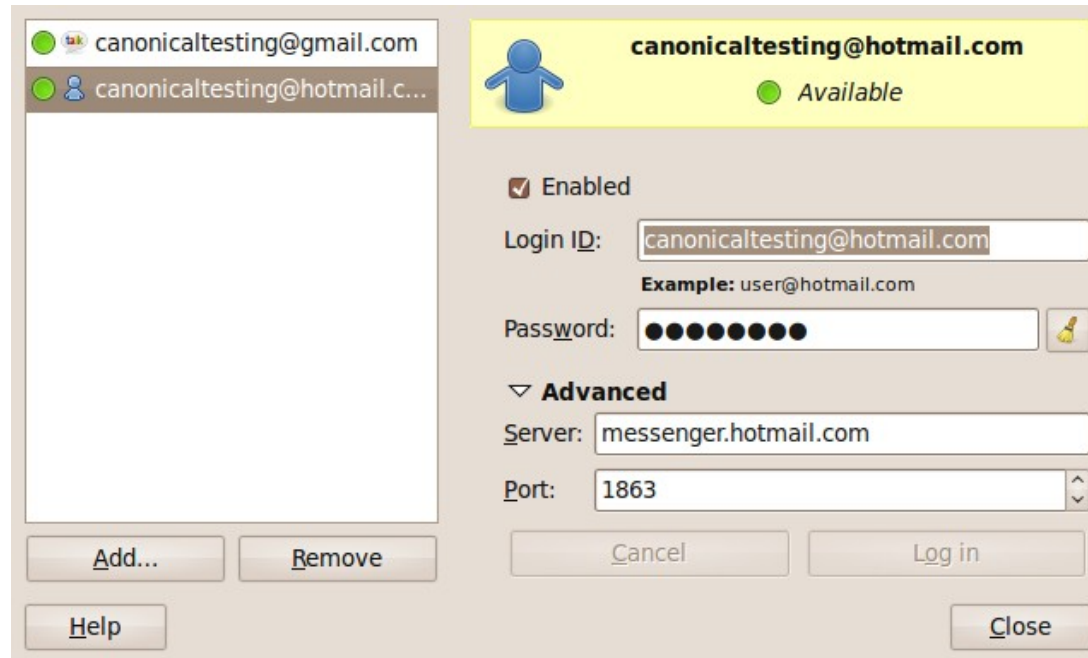
Some participants discovered the 'invisible' button beside the status that is a shortcut to the accounts.



# Recommendation


Make sure any 'invisible' button is replaced with one users can see.

# Window does not scale down



# Notifications


Participant interpreted  
notification of incoming  
chat as a sign of urgency  
put on by sender



“I like this [notification of message received in the upper right corner]. You see, Jenny put it more urgent by putting an alarm on it. Her way to notify me that she has done something”

# Notifications

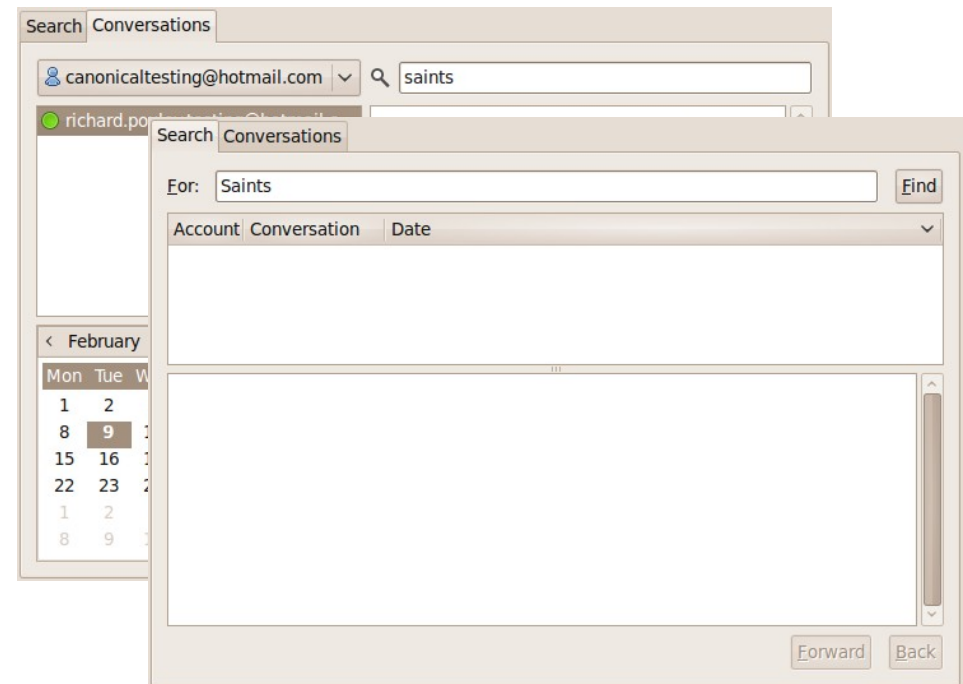
Participants with a large number of contacts online raised the issue of the notification display when Empathy first connects.



“What happens when I have a long list of contacts online? Does the notification go all the way down the page?”

# Press return to activate search

In conversations, participants were unsure if they should press return to activate a search or if they should use the button. Under the search tab, they needed to click on find whereas on the conversations tab, they use return



# Recommendation

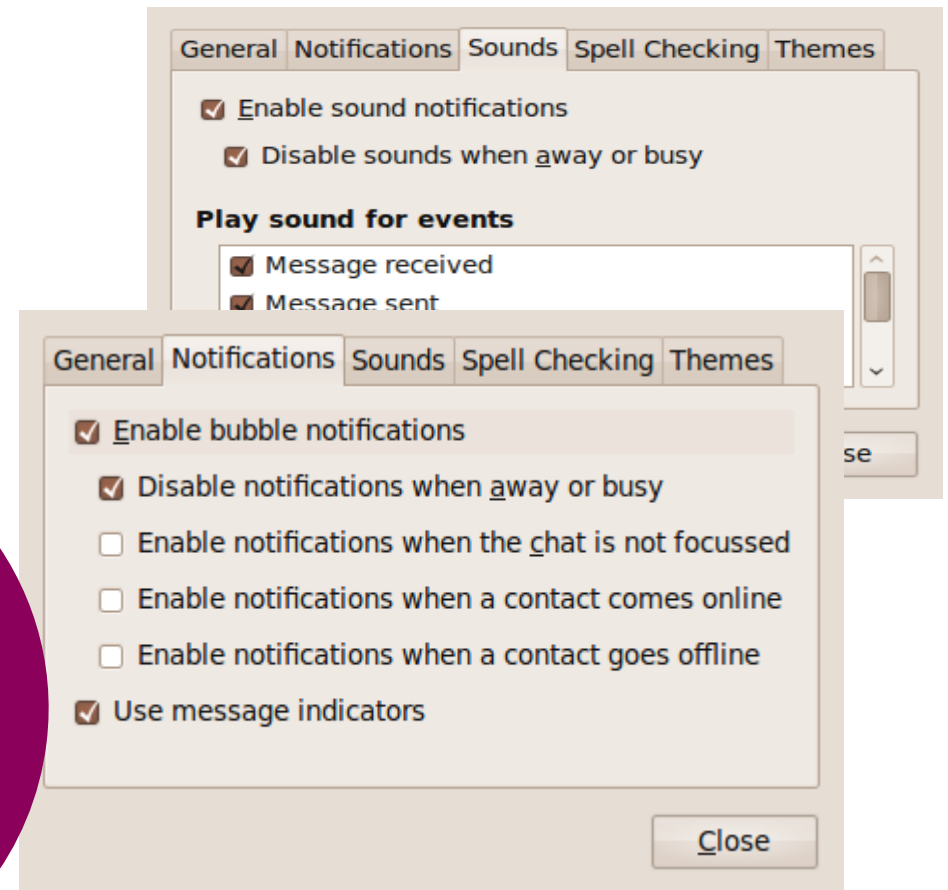
The same action should have a consistent behaviour throughout the interface.

Make the search consistent.

# Grouping of notifications

“Notification and sounds is confusing. Not sure about the grouping. Notification and sound does the same thing but in different medium. They belong together. I want to be notified visually or with sound.”

“It is a bit confusing.”

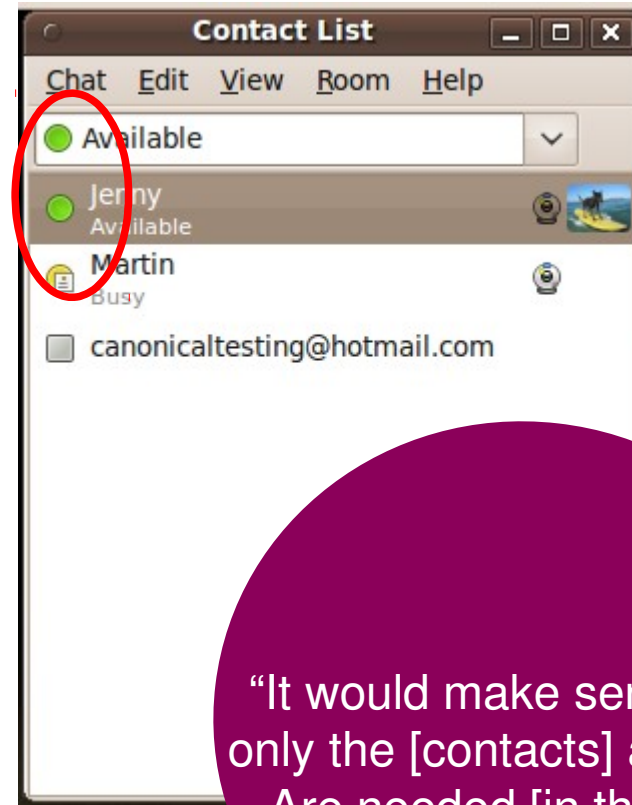


# Recommendation

Organise 'notifications' and 'sounds' under one header, 'notifications' subdivided into visual, sound and other.

# Sorting contacts

Participants didn't expect that their contact list would be in alphabetical order by default. They wanted to see who was online at the top. They would have liked to also sort their list by the most popular contacts.



“It would make sense that only the [contacts] available Are needed [in the list].”

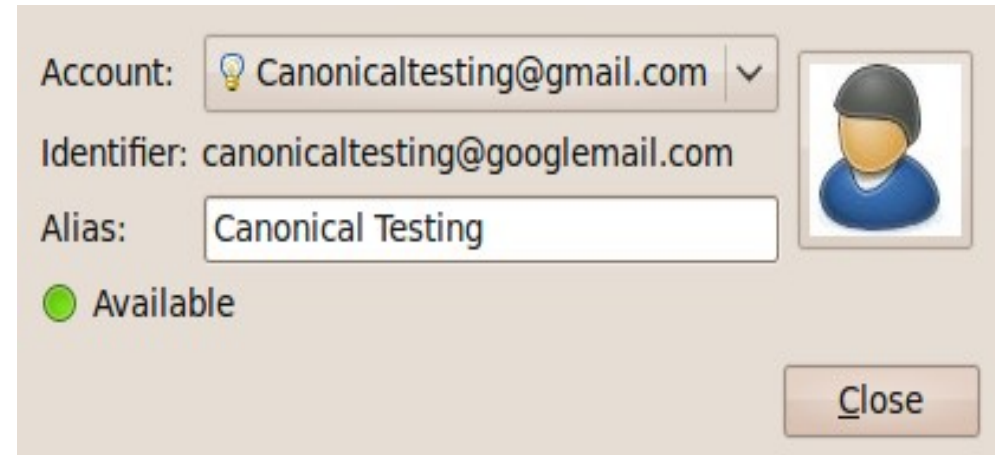
# Recommendation

Display by default contacts available first. Offer additional ways of sorting contacts, for example, by the most popular.

# Renaming accounts

Participants don't think about their accounts in terms of email address. They would like to be able to give it a name that is meaningful to them.

“It would be nice if I could rename my accounts.”

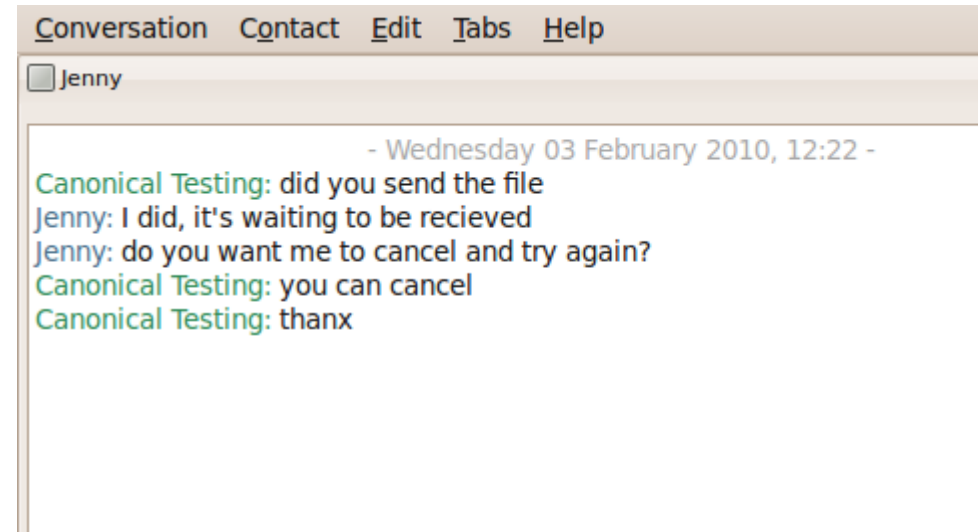


# Recommendation

Allow for users to change the name of their accounts.

# Distinguishing contributions at a glance

A few participants remarked that the colour difference between the various contributors was so close that they couldn't see the difference between them at a glance. They suggested more colour differentiation between the people in a conversation

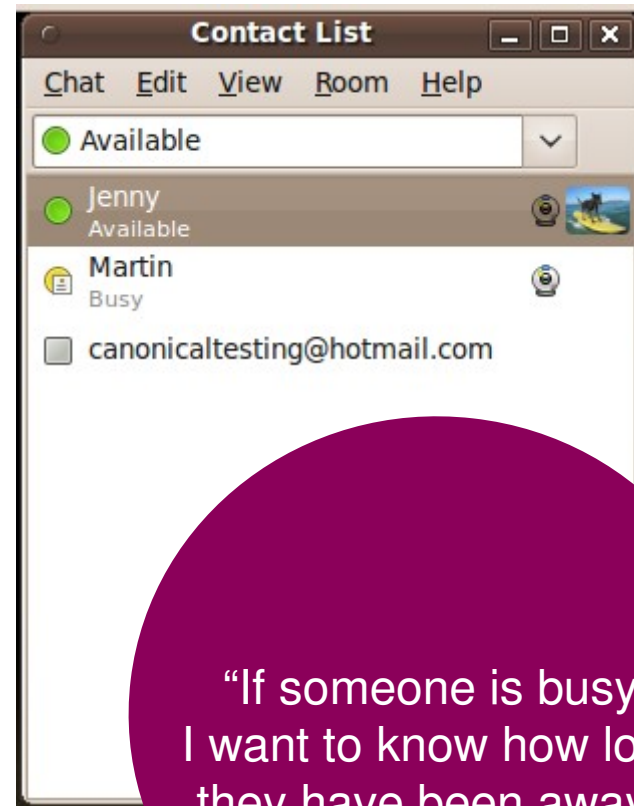


# Recommendation

Use contrasting colours to differentiate the source of contributions.

# Last activity online

When a contact is busy, there should be information about how long they've been away so participants would know if it is worth contacting them in another way instead.

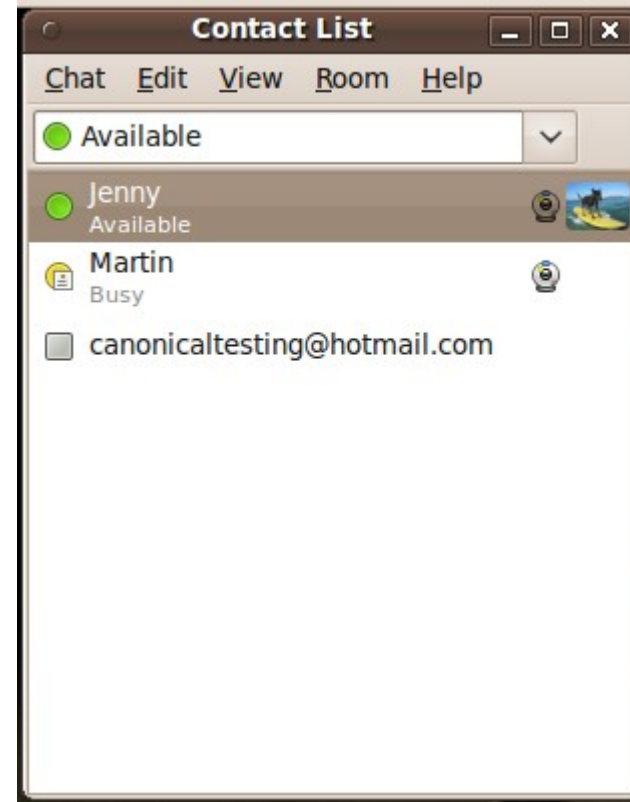


# Recommendation

Add an information pop-up indicating the last activity of people whose status is busy or offline.

# Application brand

One participant pointed out that the application was not branded and it would be better if it were, as to make it clear to the user what they are using at the moment.



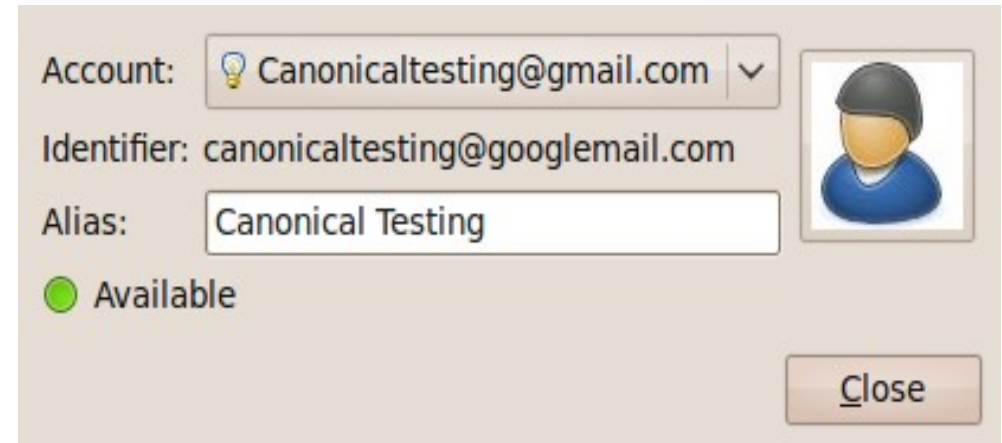
# Recommendation

Make the application visually distinctive so people know they are using Empathy.

# Changing alias

One participant especially appreciated being able to change his alias. He would have liked to be able to change his alias on a contact basis.

“Being able to change alias  
Is great. Often you have  
Different accounts  
for different purposes.”



# Recommendation:

Make evident the ability to group contacts and accounts under specific purposes and emphasize useful information such as alias, camera availability, etc.

