

IT'S A SMALL WORLD THANKS TO BT'S INTELLIGENT DIRECTORY

Submitted by: Pirate Communications

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Clever phone directory software from BT uses peoples' social networks to help them make quicker connections

It is speculated that most people on earth are separated from one another by no more than six degrees of separation, or six friends of friends or even work colleagues. If this is true it means that many people may be a lot closer to Kylie than they think!

Scientific research into the possibility of linking any two people in the world by six interpersonal relationships – or degrees of separation – has been ongoing since the 1960s. But only now, thanks to innovative artificial intelligence software developed by BT, can such a theory be put into practice to improve business efficiency.

BT researchers have developed an intelligent contacts directory for businesses using artificial intelligence software called small world directories or SWORD, which saves time and effort in finding the right person and makes much more efficient use of extensive company databases. It helps users find and contact the person they are looking for much faster by learning about users' own social networks and usage patterns.

While online directories within large organisations have made it much easier to find people's phone numbers, contacting the right person can still be a tricky business, especially if you are looking for a Smith, Jones or Patel. SWORD works by putting the user at the centre of his or her own universe, updating their personal contacts profile according to the frequency and number of calls they make to colleagues. So as they contact people, SWORD builds up information that increases the chance of providing the right number at the top of the list next time around. The system also locates colleagues' numbers more quickly, by grouping and ranking them according to various predefined criteria, such as their organisational unit within a large company, or their geographical location.

To date, several of BT's corporate customers have been impressed with the prototype, which produces consistently accurate results. Furthermore, its underlying technology also has the potential to help in mobile telephone directory assistance. Whereas search criteria for fixed-line directory enquiries are always very specific, such as name and address, the mobile world is different. A mobile phone is usually not associated with a geographical location, but a 'social network' of relationships, such as address book lists, does exist between the people who own the phones. Potentially, SWORD could make use of this social network to help make people easier to contact, without the need to specify a physical address.

Mike Carr, director, research and venturing, BT said: "SWORD is very appealing to use, it's intuitive and unlike any existing directories, the benefit of using it grows each time you use it. This research is significant because it has combined the nature of human beings as social animals, with leading-edge artificial intelligence technology, to help people connect more quickly, and completely."

Notes to Editors

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BT consists principally of three lines of business:

- BT Retail, providing fixed and mobile communications services and solutions and IT and networking services to more than 20 million business and residential customers in the UK. It is also a leading UK internet services provider.
- BT Wholesale, providing network services and solutions within the UK to more than 600 fixed and mobile operators and service providers including the provision of broadband, private circuits.
- BT Global Services, providing IT and networking services internationally to meet the needs of multi-site organisations with European operations. BT Global Services operates in more than 130 countries and also offers international carrier services.

In the year ended 31 March 2004, BT Group's turnover was £18,519 million with profit before goodwill amortisation, exceptional items and taxation of £2,013 million.

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