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## **Visca Online Product Review Hubz 2.0**

Instant Messaging has become an integral part of the Internet experience and is a tool found on millions of computers worldwide. However, this doesn't help webmasters enable their web site users to communicate with one another. Incompatible messaging systems, different protocols and a broad range of operating systems make it nearly impossible for standard instant messaging tools to accomplish true web site user-to-user interaction.

Florida based Digi-Net has come up with a solution to this problem that allows all site users to have one on one instant messaging sessions with each other using HUBZ. In its second release, this community building and site stickiness-enhancing concept works on a platform neutral Java server-client architecture. Meaning user A in Canada running on the UNIX platform, could effortlessly talk to another user on their favorite web site who lives in France running on Windows XP. Neither of which would need an Instant Messaging tool or even a software plug-in to do so.

HUBZ works by installing a server component onto a server of just about any platform in existence, Windows, Unix / Linux, Solaris, Mac and incorporating a small line of code into your web site pages. System requirements include the use of JVM software (Java Virtual Machine) and a minimum Pentium 333MHz with 128MB RAM. Your modified web pages will then display a small, completely customizable icon displaying the number of other users who are visiting the site at that moment and an invitation to click the icon for a list of the users. From there you can get profiles on other users (various information users have entered about themselves), and if you like what you see, start chatting with them.

Features for the Webmaster include the ability to moderate HUBZ and "kick out" any unruly users. This can be done by an administrator level security account and the use of a separate accounts based login page, which is easily setup. The HUBZ environment is highly customizable allowing you to modify all graphics, colors, fonts, messages, icons and aspect of operation imaginable. Making it easy for HUBZ to blend into the style of a web site and become part of its overall design. It also seamlessly integrates into other Digi-Net products such as the highly popular DigiChat and DigiPosts products. For NT environments, the server component can run either as an application or NT service.

Installation onto the server was a somewhat easy process. Although the documentation was unclear about some initial configuring issues, the exemplary phone and live web chat technical support that is available until 10pm EST got us back on track with a fully operational HUBZ server in no time at all. The document does however, excel in explaining the many ways you can customize the HUBZ experience for your users.

HUBZ can be purchased either as a monthly service which is hosted at Digi-Net, or as a software license for installation onto your own server. Pricing for the HUBZ PRO/50 Server starts at \$69US / month (plus \$99US setup fee) or \$199US (plus \$49US annual service plan) for the server license. The annual service plan covers complete technical support and all upgrades of the software and is mandatory for the first year. Server models include the PRO/50, PRO/100, PRO250 and the ultimate PRO/Unlimited, which sells for a very reasonable \$499US.

Overall, HUBZ is an inexpensive way to bring a truly unique community experience to your web site users. All on a platform that is stable, highly compatible and versatile. It's another winning product from Digi-Net.