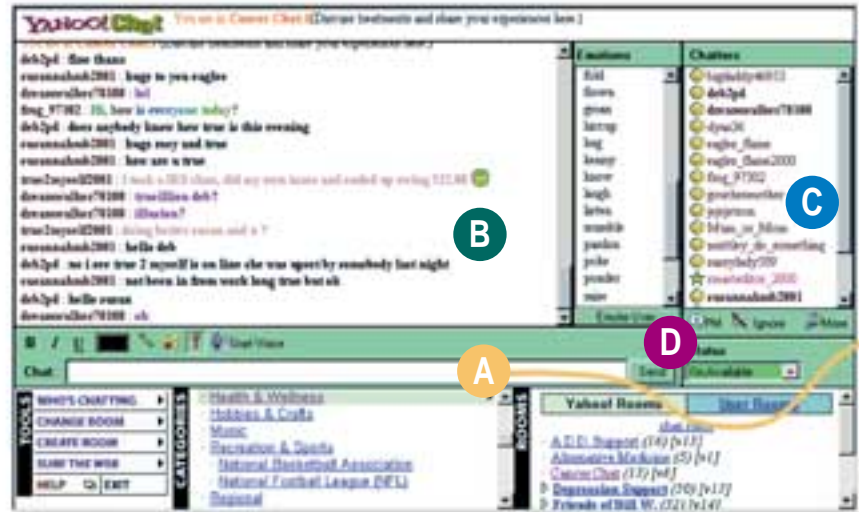# How Chat Rooms Work

Faster than e-mail, cheaper than the telephone, online chat gives Internet users a way to communicate with each other across the miles. Even though every chat program is different, most chat screens include the same main features.

After logging into a chat room, users type what they want to say with the input field (A). What you type, along with what everyone else types, shows up in the main chat window (B). The main window also typically displays messages relating to who is coming and going from the room. Instructions specific to a room might also appear here.

You can often find a participant list (C) to the side of the chat window. Here, you'll see the screen names of everyone presently using the room. Many room residents will be typing in messages, but some might simply lurk off to the side, exercising their right to remain silent. Depending on the program, there might also be a few command buttons scattered about the screen (D). These program functions might bring up room lists, block specific users from communicating with you, or call up profiles of other chatters.

1 Chat applications work by relying on a central server to coordinate messages. When you type in a message, your chat program sends it to the chat provider's server, usually over the many interconnected routes that make up the Internet.

2 The server then forwards the message via the Internet to everyone "inside" the same chat room. The server ultimately controls who is in a room, and if something happens to the server, the whole room goes offline.

Internet Service Provider

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