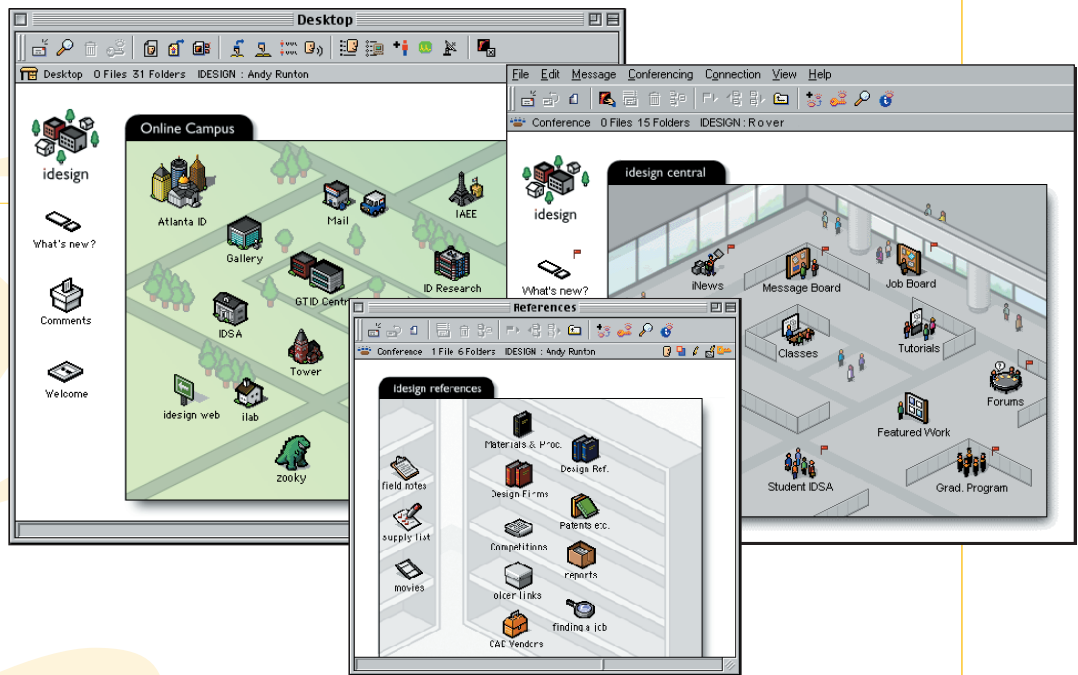


FIRSTCLASS® CASE STUDY

Customizing FirstClass-based *idesign*
at Georgia Tech's College of Architecture
Innovative Industrial Design department gives
high-tech studio a human dimension



A synchronous learning networks in design education

Design studios have always worked collaboratively. And with advances in modern global communication and the involvement in the design process of professionals from diverse disciplines, collaboration is more important than ever. To prepare students for the world of work, the Industrial Design (ID) Department in the College of Architecture at the Georgia Institute of Technology, in Atlanta, has turned to asynchronous learning networks (ALNs), a form of computer-based instruction and communication, to facilitate its collaborative design process.



idesign: humanizing virtual design through FirstClass conferencing

In the fall of 1998, Jim Budd, an Associate Professor, and Andy Runton, a graduate student, began work on idesign, an ALN based on Centrinity's FirstClass Intranet Server, an award-winning collaboration and communication groupware solution used by post-secondary institutions, K-12 schools, educational organizations and enterprises worldwide. Budd believed it was possible to use online conferences – asynchronous forums – to create a sense of community, and the idesign experience has proven him right.



The studio model for design education essentially replicates the business model ... The idea of the design office is built around the notion of collaborative synergy — a group of people working together can resolve problems more efficiently and more effectively than an individual. We felt that asynchronous learning tools, like FirstClass, could provide a means to help resolve some of these issues ... and our experience to date supports our premise.

Jim Budd, Associate Professor, FirstClass Administrator, College of Architecture, Georgia Institute of Technology



idesign benefits from the integrated collaborative environment of FirstClass Gold

- FirstClass enables extensive customization of conference structure, including icons and backgrounds
- idesign uses the community metaphor — familiar places, spaces and objects — to create a virtual studio
- FirstClass' integrated collaboration, communication, data management, calendaring and publishing features facilitate the creation of an online community:
 - ◆ asynchronous access to conferences — anytime, anywhere, using web browser or FirstClass Client
 - ◆ file sharing and knowledge management capabilities
 - ◆ support for high res images, QuickTime VR and large files
 - ◆ online publishing capabilities — website creation without HTML
 - ◆ web-compatible intranet environment — web-based reference materials within the conference environment; links to ID-related websites

For more information on *idesign*, contact Jim Budd, Associate Professor & FirstClass Administrator
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Visit *idesign's* website at <http://idesign.arch.gatech.edu/>
Visit Georgia Tech's website at www.gatech.edu



The development of a FirstClass idea ... the creation of a design community

- 1994: Florida industrial designers Dale Raymond and Richard Feltner develop FirstClass-based INID, the Information Network for Intelligent Design, the first design-related electronic forum to take advantage of an asynchronous learning network
- 1996: Surya Vanka and Jim Budd develop FirstClass-based ID-On-line (University of Illinois)
- 1998: Jim Budd and Andy Runton develop FirstClass-based idesign (Georgia Institute of Technology)

FirstClass, which allows extensive customization of the interface, provides the ideal platform for the ID community's needs. A collection of knowledge-based resources organized as online conferences, idesign is built on the mental model of a town. Its virtual environment can be easily navigated and explored by novices but holds an advanced set of features and benefits for experienced users. To make the virtual experience more attractive for their design community, Budd and Runton created three types of icons to represent interface levels: building icons for level one (the primary desktop), interior space icons for level two and object icons for level three.



Anywhere, anytime access with FirstClass Gold

FirstClass Gold, the latest version of FirstClass, enables users to access idesign from anywhere, using their web browser or FirstClass Client, which they can download from the web. Because of its seamless integration of internet and intranet functions, the new server software now allows personal homepages and internet hyperlinks to be created within the intranet system. Clicking on links in idesign's class conferences, for instance, opens a direct connection to design related sites, tutorials, or software resources, as well as to digital databases like the Materials Library at the University of Illinois or the Design History Website at Georgia Tech.



The future of collaborative design environments

Currently idesign is fairly small, especially considering that FirstClass systems can scale up to 250,000 users. However, the 200 users on the system represent the entire faculty, students and staff in Industrial Design, all of whom benefit from the variety of technical forums (for example Web Design, Flash, Director and Manufacturing), as well as conferences full of resources and references, with fast links to relevant websites.

The ID department's most recent initiative extends the virtual studio experience to the design community, including different disciplines, schools, alumni, key technical resources and clients. Longer-term objectives include developing models for online mentoring, distance education, and the integration of additional audio and video to promote more personal communication and synchronous collaboration when necessary.



"Rover" by Andy Runton. Source: Andy Runton's thesis project, "Products with Personality."

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