

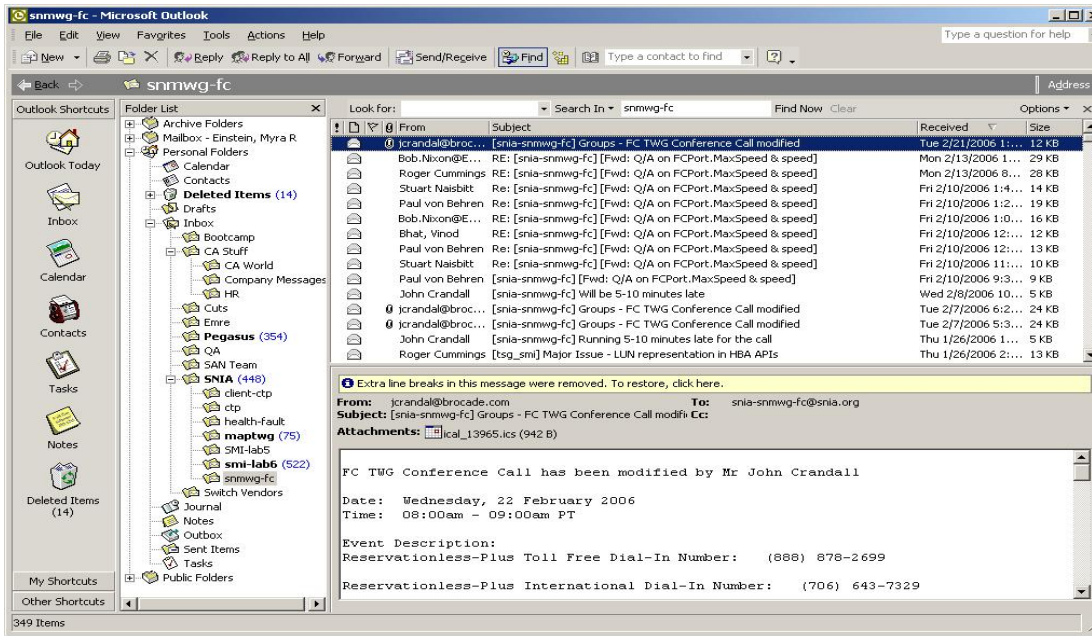
Assignment #5: Ambient Inbox

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The purpose of this assignment is to examine ways of reducing the cognitive load associated with information management and multi-tasking. The subject is the email 'inbox'. Your task is to design a new way of displaying email activity that makes optimal use of foreground and background. Your design can encompass any combination of physical platforms, from PC's to mobile devices to the physical environment. Please consider the different strategies we examined in class for reducing the cognitive load: Mapping, Periphery, Embodiment, Situational.

The ambient mailbox is designed to be a visual display of the unread mail in the user's email inbox. It is designed for the work setting and can either be the desktop image or a separate thin display wirelessly connected to the computer. The visual contains a series of different colored circles where the color, size, and position on the screen denote different aspects of the email. The user can then glance quickly at the display and see what types of emails they have received and can determine if any are important enough for them to interrupt what they were working on.

Ambient Inbox: Context



Describe the key insights that emerged from talking to typical users, observing situations and contexts or reviewing existing products and services:

1. Standard mail programs can be distracting

These types of programs only notify you when you have new mail, and it's up to the user to find out who it's from and whether the email is important. It requires the user to leave what they were doing to check the importance of the email, which can be distracting if the user receives frequent emails.

2. Filters and Folders only slightly help

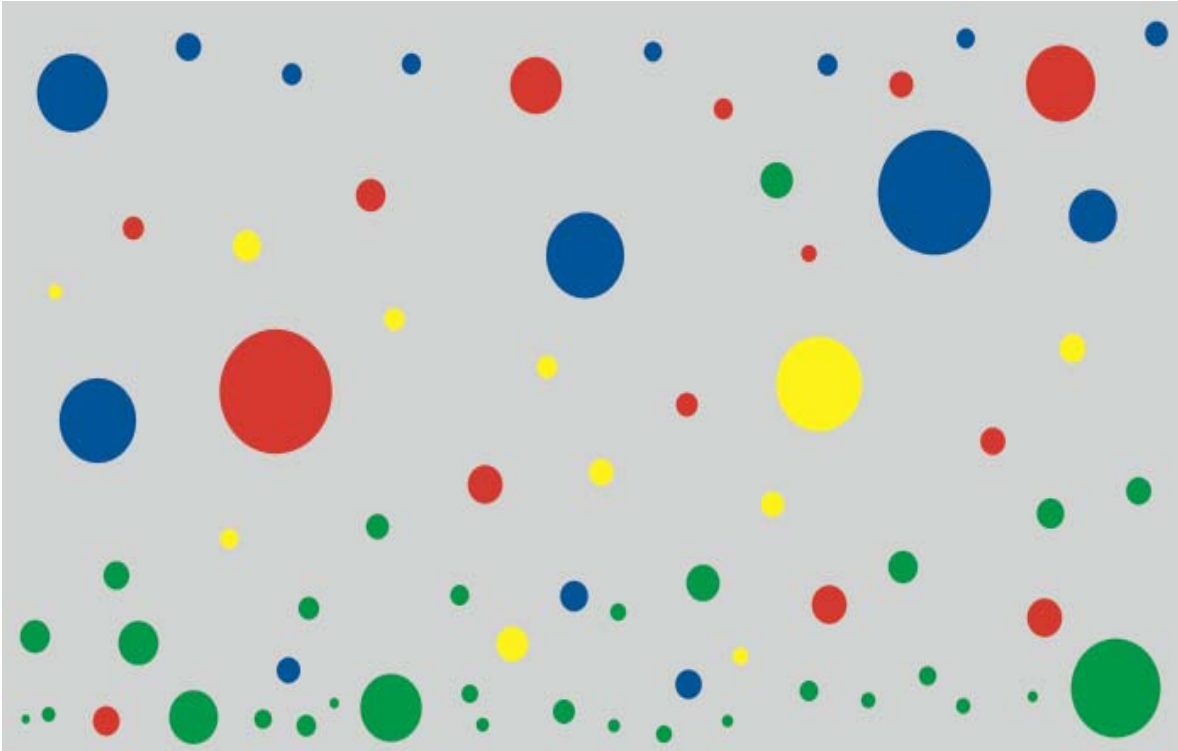
stead The use of filters and different file folders can help the user determine what type of mail has arrived, but they still need to sort through and search for the new mail, which still requires a cognitive load.

4. Visualizations can help ease burden

Instead of reading through the text, having visual cues as to what type of mail is in the inbox can help ease the cognitive load when receiving new mail at a frequent rate.



Ambient Inbox: Overview



Overview:

1. Location of visualization

The visualization can be either on the user's computer desktop or on a thin display that can reside on the desk or hung on the wall. This keeps the display out of the user's immediate view point but is quickly accessible with one glance.

2. Uses filters and folders from standard email

It uses the filters and folders already created by the user to help identify the categories of mail in the inbox. The user can designate which color corresponds to which folder/filter.

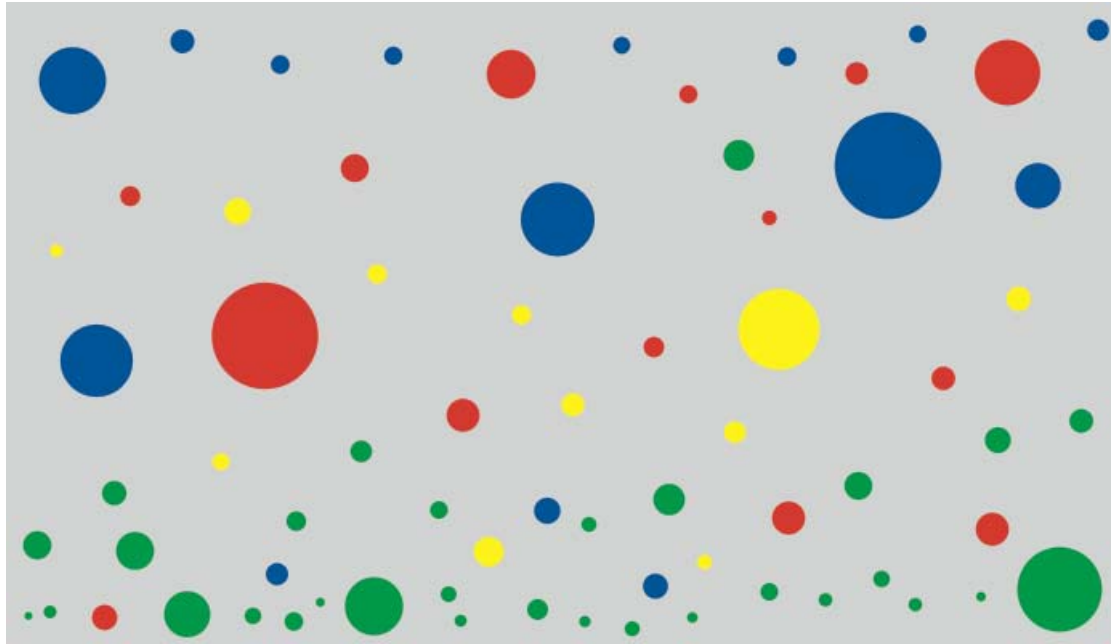
3. Visualization provides quick information

Many characteristics are represented in the visualization, allowing for quick access of information.

4. Links to standard email programs

User can double click on a circle if they decide to read the email and be brought to their standard email application, where they can read the email in it's entirety.

Ambient Inbox: Interaction Details



Detail 1: Know the category by the color

Linking in the use of filters and folders, the different colored circles represent the different categories of emails. Just a quick glance will tell you what types of emails you have received.

Detail 2: Know 'importance'

Where the circle resides on the screen shows how 'important' an email is to the user. Importance is measured by how often the user replies back to the sender and by user input (ex. You receive multiple emails from a listserve, but do not often reply back vs your team members who you write back and forth with often).

Detail 3: Know size of thread

The size of the circle is relative to the size of the email thread (i.e. how many emails are received with the same subject)?

Detail 4: Know relative time received

The most recent emails are towards the right of the screen, the older unread emails are towards the left.