SLAM Games I-Room Project – Project Results Summary
Chris Walton - 11 April 2008

Our experience of the I-Room media demonstrator was very positive. Slam Games operates in a distributed development environment, with the participants (e.g. programmers, artists, musicians) spread over multiple physical locations. This environment makes face-to-face meetings impractical, and so we use many different collaboration technologies to manage our interactions. The tools that we currently use are primarily text-based (e.g. email, IM, campfire, Confluence, and JIRA). While this is acceptable, we believe there are many advantages to having a visual component to our interactions, as provided by the I-Room demonstrator.

The main limitation of text-based tools is that it can be difficult to describe the source of a problem. In our experience, it often requires many messages to be sent back-and-forth before the source of the problem is properly communicated. By contrast, with face-to-face interactions we would simply be able to say "show me the problem". The I-Room goes a long way towards addressing this issue. It provides a facility for displaying graphical images, and allows the participants to use text, voice, and gestures to effectively communicate the problem areas. This facility would significantly mitigate the communication issues that we currently have.

An additional advantage of the I-Room demonstrator is that it has low technology requirements for the participants. Essentially any computer with a reasonably Internet connection and a microphone can participate. This is very important for us as we do not want to become bogged down in complex technological requirements or installation procedures. We interact with many different groups of people, and these groups are constantly changing, so we do not want to impose technological barriers before they can talk to us. The requirements of the I-Room demonstrator appear to provide a good fit to our existing collaboration technologies.

The I-Room demonstrator provides a facility for gathering meeting minutes. This is essential for us, as we need to have a record of the decisions made in our meetings for contractual purposes. We need to be able to refer back to decisions made in meetings to ensure that any issues raised have been properly solved. Finally, the simple provision of a visual avatar for each of the meeting participants is a useful facility. We often do not want to communicate internal decisions to external contractors. The presence of the avatars is an important visual cue as to who is involved in the meeting, what topics should be discussed or avoided, and to ensure that all of the necessary participants are present.

In summary, the I-Room media demonstrator provides a direct solution to many of the issues of communication in a distributed environment, as we have at Slam Games. We will be giving serious consideration to adding this facility to our set of collaboration technologies.