

MindSpring User Interface Text (Samples)

Introduction

This document features samples of UI text I created for MindSpring, a Windows VoIP and instant messaging application. It also describes challenges I faced and explains my solutions to those challenges.

Product Description

MindSpring is a VoIP softphone and instant messaging application similar to Skype. It lets the user make voice calls using a computer, chat, send and receive files, listen to voicemail, and preview incoming email messages.

Target Audience

The primary audience is EarthLink customers who subscribe to one of EarthLink's VoIP home phone plans. MindSpring makes these home phone services portable, allowing customers to make calls on their home accounts while on the road (e.g., by installing MindSpring on a laptop computer). During development, we worked under the assumption that most of these customers had little or no experience with softphones.

The secondary audience is any Internet user who wants to make calls using a computer. For these users, calls to other MindSpring users are free, while calls to landline or mobile numbers are billed at a per-minute rate.

UI Text Objectives

The objective was to word the application's buttons, menus, dialogs, and other text intuitively enough that users would be able to use MindSpring's many features easily.

My Contribution

I wrote the UI text in Word for delivery to the engineering team. I also followed the application's development through engineering and usability testing to root out and revise inaccurate, unclear, or otherwise problematic UI text. Finally, I led editorial scrub meetings to discuss text fixes that would improve MindSpring.



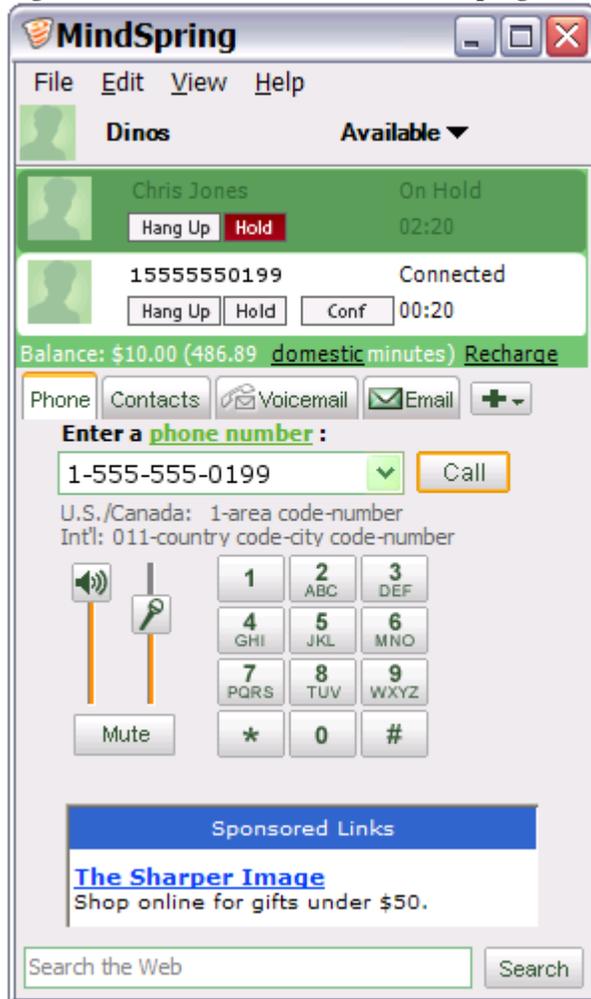
Samples

Main Window (Calls in Progress)

The main window (Figure 1) opens to the Phone tab by default. The green call display area at the top of the window reveals buttons and call status information when calls are in progress.

- **The Challenge:** The call display area is small, so button labels have to convey their functions in a minimum of space.
- **My Solution:** I opted for terminology common to mobile and office phones rather than more computer-centric labels (e.g., “Hang Up” instead of “End Call”). I did so for two reasons: Designers of those devices face the same issue of minimal space for text, and most consumers are familiar with mobile and office phone interfaces and the button labels they use.

Figure 1 - Main window with two calls in progress.



2nd Call Button

The 2nd Call button appears in the call display area when only one call is connected (Figure 2). Clicking it puts the current call on hold so that the user can make a second call.

- **The Challenge:** The project manager wanted the UI to clearly convey the fact that two simultaneous calls are possible with MindSpring. A button was created to make that feature obvious to the user. I was tasked with writing a label for this very small button.
- **My Solution:** After considering several labels that were either unclear or too large to fit the available space, I collaborated with the graphic designer to arrive at a combination of the text “2nd” next to a phone icon.

Figure 2 - “2nd Call” button in call display area.



Voicemail Preferences

The Voicemail preferences screen (Figure 3) lets the user turn voicemail on and off and specify an email address for receiving voicemail messages as email attachments.

- **The Challenge:** MindSpring's voicemail options have the potential to confuse some users. In particular, the email address entered on this screen is not the only one to which voicemail is sent; each voicemail is also sent to the email address used to sign into MindSpring.
- **My Solution:** The space above the "Voice Mail Settings" section of the dialog was originally reserved for more general explanatory text. I changed it so that it explained, as briefly as possible, how voicemail messages are delivered and the user's options for listening to them.

Figure 3 - Voicemail preferences screen.

