

Access IBM Message Center

Introduction

When a company purchases new computers, users are often unaware of many of the powerful tools that are preinstalled on their systems. Consequently, much of the potential productivity of the new systems is not utilized—not because the systems cannot produce, but because the users are unaware of useful programs or utilities that are installed on their computers. IBM® now provides a simple and easy way to notify and educate users about the powerful tools that exist on their computers: the Access IBM Message Center.

The Access IBM Message Center

The Access IBM Message Center is designed to deliver relevant, system-specific notifications to a user. These messages might be preinstalled on the computer by IBM (local messages), delivered through Access Support from IBM (web messages), or added to the Message Center later by an IT department or system administrator. The Access IBM Message Center delivers important information about software installed on the computer and about device driver updates. Only messages that apply to the recipient's computer model are displayed.

The Access IBM Message Center program icon, which is shown in Figure 1, resides in the system tray and, when a new message is broadcast, pops up a bubble display to get the attention of the user. Any program can deliver a message through the Message Center as long as the message adheres to the guidelines presented in this document.



Figure 1

To open the Message Center, double-click the Message Center icon. If there are any messages, they are displayed as shown in Figure 2. Otherwise, the Message Center is blank.

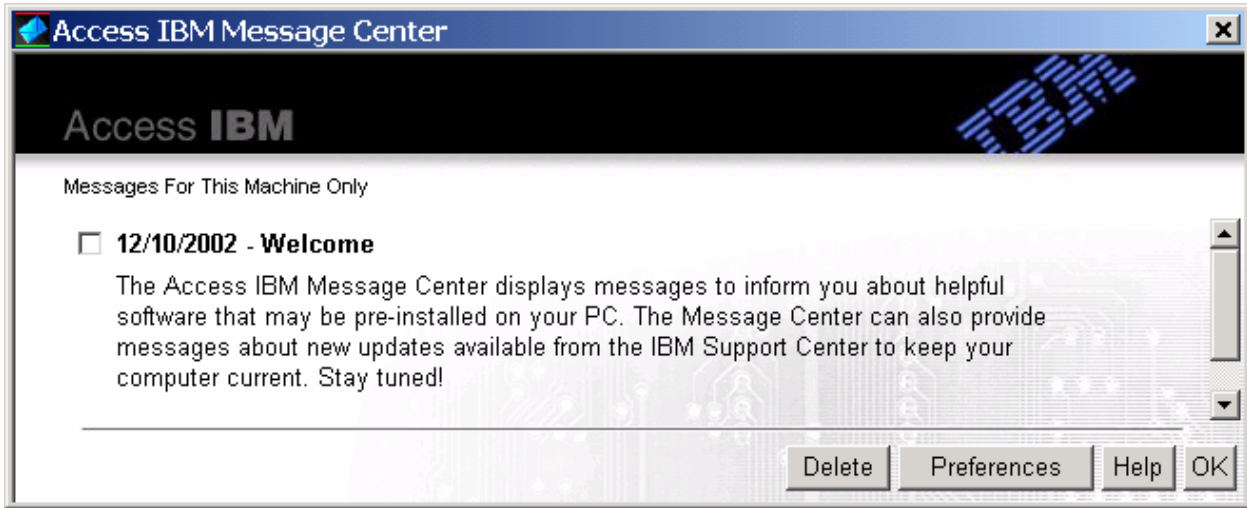


Figure 2

When the icon in the system tray is clicked, a menu is displayed enabling the user to launch Access IBM programs, to view the Message Center, to hide the Access IBM bubble messages, or to exit the Message Center, as shown in Figure 3.

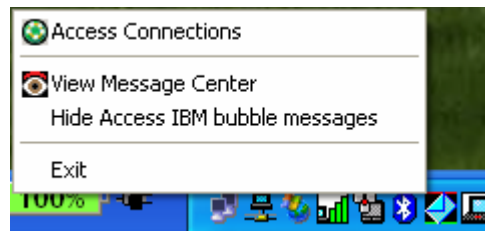


Figure 3

When a message becomes available, the Message Center alerts the user with a pop-up bubble that displays the title of the new message. The icon in the system tray also changes color to indicate a new message is available. These features are shown in Figure 4.

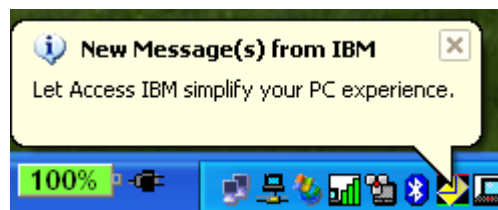


Figure 4

On systems running Windows XP, the Message Center opens when the bubble is clicked. On systems running Windows 2000, the bubble message is minimized when the bubble is clicked.

Local messages vs. Web messages

The Access IBM Message Center delivers two types of messages in the preinstalled environment. The first type is the local message. Local messages are preinstalled on the computer and programmed to display when certain events occur. For example, one message that might get delivered locally is a message reminding the user to use Access IBM. But this message is only delivered if Access IBM is installed on the computer, and it has not been opened two days after the computer is initially used. There are six local messages in the current implementation, but that could change at any time. Local messages do not require an Internet connection.

Web messages are delivered through a program called Access Support. To get Web messages, Access Support must be enabled. To enable Access Support, simply click the Preferences button in the Message Center. Figure 5 illustrates what the Preferences window will look like if Access Support is installed.

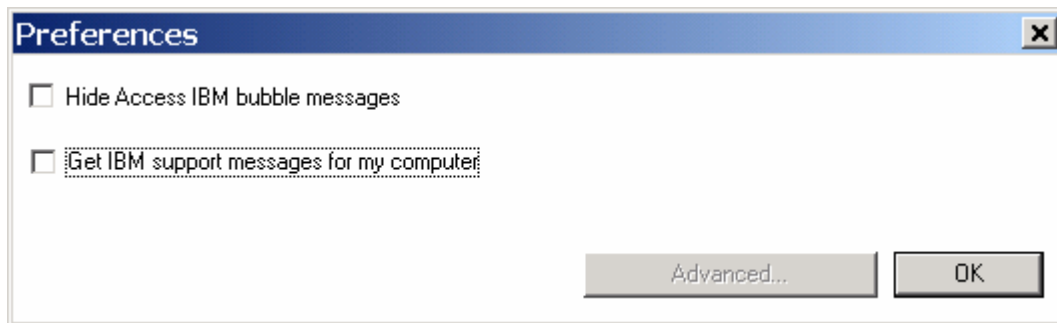


Figure 5

Click the **Get IBM support messages for my computer** check box to get Web messages. Web messages enable IBM to inform users of useful information that is becoming available. The Message Center automatically filters these messages so that only those messages that apply to your particular machine type and operating system are displayed. For example, a Web message might inform the user that a new device driver is available for their particular machine type. This message will display automatically if Web messages are enabled.

Web messages can also be expanded to include messages about all IBM computers models and operating systems. When you select the **Get IBM support messages for my computer** check box the Advanced button is enabled. Click the Advanced button to get messages for *other* computers models and operating systems. The Advanced Messaging Preferences window is shown in Figure 6.

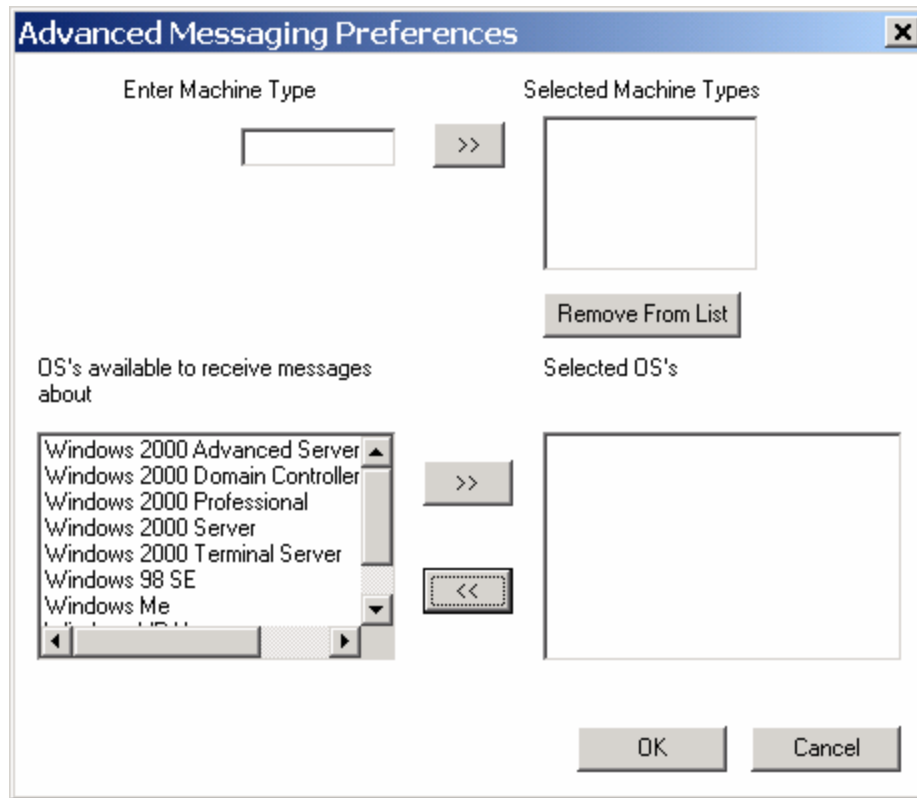


Figure 6

What a message file contains

A sample XML message file might look like the following:

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8" standalone="yes"?>
<message id="aconn.xml">
<title>Manage all your connections simply!</title>
<body>Configure multiple network connections and easily switch between them. Gain
ultimate PC freedom with the latest in wireless networking.</body>
<category>Wireless</category>

<version>1.0</version>
<language>English</language>
<locale>US</locale>
<machines>all</machines>
<launch1>
    <text>Start Now</text>
    <app>aibmrun.exe</app>
```



```
<param1>'IBM Access Connections'</param1>  
</launch1>  
</message>
```

The following table lists the elements that each Message Center message XML file might contain.

The `<?xml version="1.0" encoding="utf-8" standalone="yes"?>` line should always be at the top of the file. If other languages are used, then the encoding might need to change, but utf-8 should be used otherwise. Every message must be enclosed in the `< message id= "" >` element and have a unique ID, which is the same as the file name.

Element	Required	Contents	Example
version	No	Version of the Access IBM Message Center	1.0
title	Yes	Title of the message	Let Access IBM Simplify Your PC Experience
body	Yes	Main text of the message	Learn useful PC tasks. Click Start now or press the blue Access IBM Button anytime.
date_received	No	Date of the message in MM/DD/YYYY format. If left blank, it is filled in with the current date.	01/12/2003
date_expired		Date the message expires in MM/DD/YYYY format. The message is deleted after this date.	01/23/2003
url		The URL of a website to present to the user	www.ibm.com
category		The message category	Driver Update
language		The message language	EN
locale		The message locale	US
source		Program that generated the file	Access Support
machines		This is the four-digit machine type number(s) that this message applies to. If there are multiple machine types, a comma separates the numbers. If every machine, it can be "all". DEFAULT should be "all"	2678,2884
launch1	No	Inside of this element are the next 3 elements	<pre><launch1> <app>c:\windows\notepad.exe</app> <text>Notepad</text> <param1>c:\filetoopen.txt</para,> </launch1></pre>



Element	Required	Contents	Example
launch1 app	Yes, if a launch1	This is the path to the executable file that will be launched.	C:\windows\notepad.exe
launch1 text	Yes, if a launch1	Text to display to the user at launch, such as the application name.	Notepad
launch1 param1	No	Parameter to pass to the application.	C:\filetoopen.txt
launch2	No	Inside of this element are the next 3 elements	<launch2> <app>c:\windows\notepad.exe</app> <text>Notepad</text> <param1>c:\filetoopen.txt</para,> </launch2>
launch2 app	Yes, if a launch2	This is the path to the executable file that will be launched.	C:\windows\notepad.exe
launch2 text	Yes, if a launch2	Text to display to the user at launch, such as the application name.	Notepad
launch2 param1	No	Parameter to pass to the application.	C:\filetoopen.txt
launch3	No	Inside of this element are the next 3 elements	<launch3> <app>c:\windows\notepad.exe</app> <text>Notepad</text> <param1>c:\filetoopen.txt</para,> </launch3>
launch3 app	Yes, if a launch3	This is the path to the executable file that will be launched.	C:\windows\notepad.exe
launch3 text	Yes, if a launch3	Text to display to the user at launch, such as the application name.	Notepad
launch3 param1	No	Parameter to pass to the application.	C:\filetoopen.txt

Delivering messages of your own

To use the Access IBM Message Center to deliver messages of your own, you must set up a client-server application so that every computer that will receive messages is linked as a client to the server application that will post the messages. This could be a simple client-server application where a client residing on the recipient system queries the server at given intervals for any available messages. You can use sockets or an HTTP protocol to accomplish this. The key is to deliver the message to the correct directory, and in the appropriate format.

To have a message display in the Access IBM Message Center, the message must be placed in the c:\documents and settings\all users\application data\ibm\messages\ directory. This directory changes for other languages and, in rare circumstances, for Microsoft Windows® 2000 and XP. This folder is used because it is the “common application folder” and any user can write to it or read from it. This folder is stored in the

path in the registry under the following key:
 HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Microsoft\Windows\CurrentVersion\Explorer\Shell Folders\CommonAppData. This key refers to the path “c:\documents and settings\all users\application data” only, but by simply appending the key with “\ibm\messages” the full path to the message directory is provided. After a client-server application has been set up, the Access IBM Message Center will display local messages, Web messages, and customer messages, as illustrated in Figure 7.

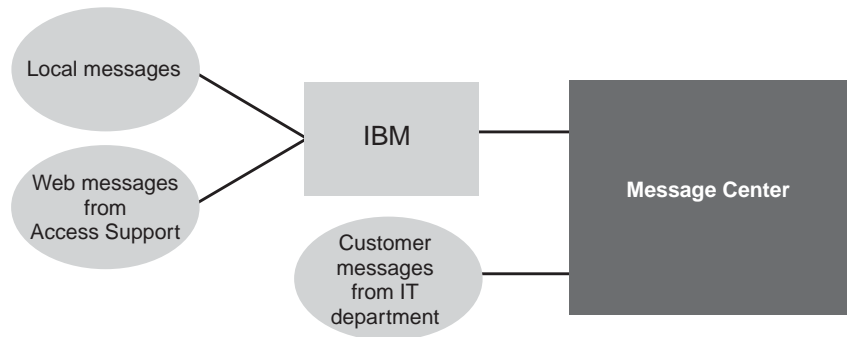
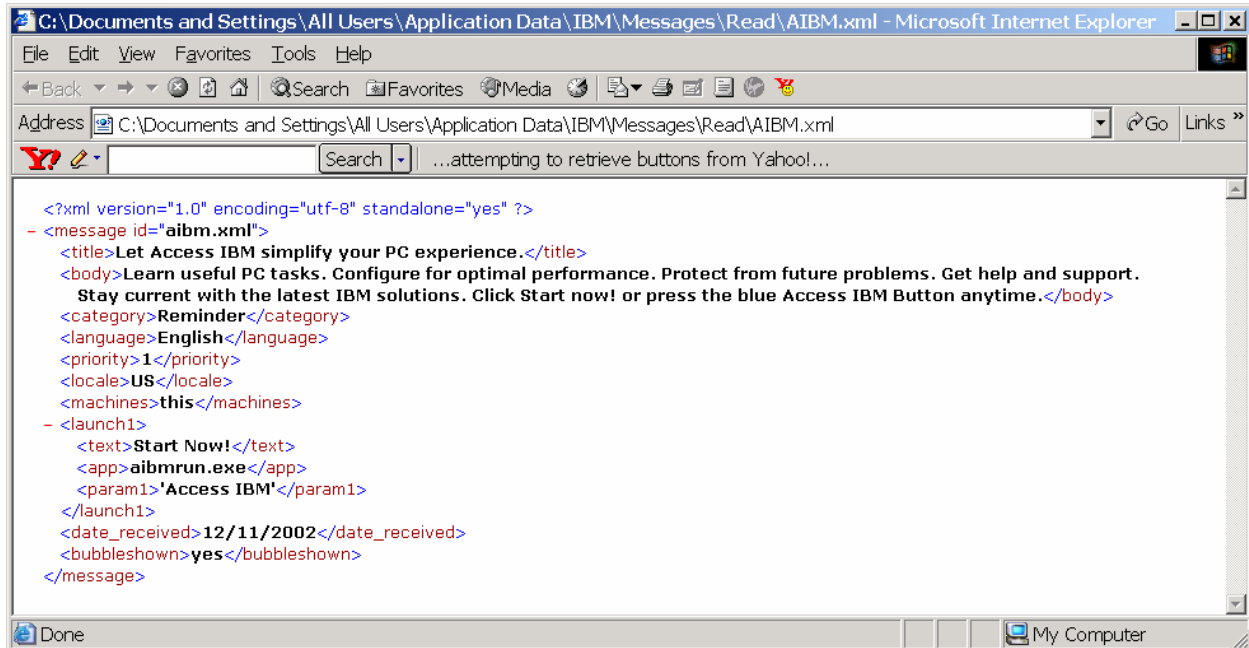


Figure 7

After an XML message file is placed in the appropriate directory, it might take up to 30 seconds for the Message Center to respond to it, if the Message Center is running. The typical response is a bubble message that pops up and that contains the title of the message. However, if a bubble has popped up in the past hour, the Message Center responds by changing the Message Center system tray icon and by adding flyover text to note that a new message is available. In this way, users are not distracted by too many pop-up messages. If an XML message is placed in the appropriate directory and the Message Center does not respond at all, then either the XML file is incorrect or the message guidelines were not followed. To verify that the XML file is correct, open it with Microsoft Internet Explorer. The Message Center uses the same XML parser as Internet Explorer, so if the Internet Explorer can read the file, the Message Center can read it too. The following screen illustrates how Microsoft Internet Explorer displays an XML file:



After the Message Center has opened and new messages have been displayed, these messages are considered to be read. They are then moved to the Read directory in the c:\documents and settings\all users\IBM\messages\read path.

Summary

The Access IBM Message Center can greatly enhance productivity by providing users with timely notifications and information about the powerful tools that are on their computers. Whether these messages are local messages that are scheduled to be displayed at predetermined events or specific times, Web messages that provide timely information about the latest updates for the computer, or customer messages that broadcast useful company messages, the Access IBM Message Center delivers powerful results. By providing a simple and easy means to notify and educate users about the powerful tools that exist on their systems, the Access IBM Message Center provides information that users need when they need it the most.



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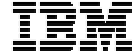
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