

The Meeting Pot: Coffee Aroma Transmitter

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1 Meeting Pot

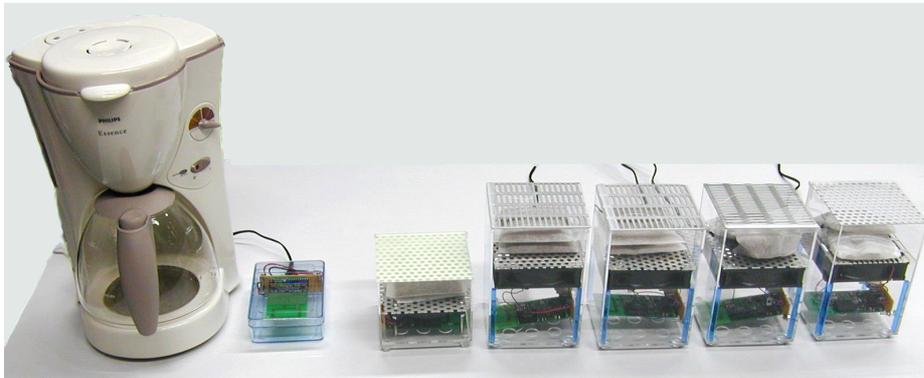


Fig. 1. The Meeting Pot system, with a coffee maker and 5 coffee aroma generators.

In a modern networked office, we have an issue as to how to create a community. To encourage informal communication at the coffee break space in an office, we have implemented a Meeting Pot system. This system informs colleagues in their office that people are meeting in the open space for a coffee break, by transmitting coffee aroma to remote locations.

Figure 1 shows the Meeting Pot system, which consists of a coffee maker and 5 coffee aroma generators. The coffee maker has been remodeled to transmit radio frequency (RF) signals when the heater is turned on to prepare coffee. As the system detects human activities indirectly through activities of the coffee maker, we can alleviate privacy concerns.

Though the information that people are meeting for a coffee break is important to activate the informal communication, it is of a comparatively low priority in daily office work. We have decided to display the information of the coffee maker in an ambient manner, that is, by the smell of coffee. The coffee

aroma generator contains a fan, an RF receiver and instant coffee powder. The fan is activated, when an RF signal from the coffee maker is received, and it emits the smell of the coffee from freeze-dried instant coffee powder installed above.

2 Feasibility Test



Fig. 2. The common room where the coffee maker is installed (left), and the aroma generator installed in an office (right).

To test the feasibility of the Meeting Pot system, we have installed the coffee maker in the common room, and 5 coffee aroma generators in the faculty offices of the Future University-Hakodate, as shown in Figure 2. The signal from the coffee maker is also received by a server computer, which sends electronic mail.

We have selected 10 subjects from faculty staff, and they are divided into two groups of 5. One of the groups has the aroma generator installed in their office, and the rest of them receive electronic mail that say coffee will be ready in a few minutes. We have swapped their notification method at the middle of the feasibility test period of 16 weeks.

We interviewed them and many of the subjects answered that the system encourages their informal communication very naturally. Most of them preferred coffee aroma generators, however, some of them like e-mail too. Although a few subjects want to know who is in the room, they do not want their behavior to be detected in the room.

Sometimes, they could not go out of the office to join colleagues because they were busy with their job. Even at that time, many of them relaxed by feeling an awareness of colleagues and sometimes they took a short break by themselves. We can apply the system to provide comfortable awareness of office colleagues or family members in the same or remote locations.