

Claims:

~~1. A method for determining the availability of at least one target user for a specific type of communication, the method comprising:~~

~~retrieving contact information of at least one target user from a memory of a requesting user terminal;~~

~~sending a request for communication status information of the at least one target user to a status network element, the status network element being arranged to provide the communication status information regarding the availability of the target user for the specific type of communication, wherein the request comprises at least a portion of the contact information of the at least one target user and identifies the specific type of communication;~~

~~receiving, as a response to the request, a response message from the status network element, wherein the response message comprises the communication status information of the at least one target user; and~~

~~modifying at least a portion of stored contact information when the received status information indicates that the target user is available for communication via the specific communication type, such that the modified contact information indicates on the requesting user terminal the current availability of the at least one user for communication via the specific communication type.~~

2. A method according to Claim 1, further comprising sensing the occurrence of a predetermined trigger event in the operation of the user terminal, and sending the request for status information automatically as a response to the sensed trigger event.

3. A method according to Claim 2, wherein sensing step comprises sensing storing of new contact information into the memory of the user terminal as the trigger event.

~~4. A method according to Claim 2, wherein sensing step comprises sensing the~~

~~commencing of a communication application for a specific communication type on the user terminal, as the trigger event.~~

5. A method according to any preceding claim, wherein the sending step comprises sending a request for status information for a group of target users to the status network node to determine the communication availability status of each member of the group for the specific type of communication.

6. A method according to Claim 5, wherein the sending step comprises sending a batch of requests for the group of target users by delaying a report of a presence status change for selected target users until a scheduled update interval..

7. A method according to Claim 5 or 6, wherein the receiving step comprises receiving a plurality of response messages, one for each member of the group.

8. A method according to Claim 7, wherein the receiving step comprises receiving a response message, wherein the response message comprises a collection of communication availability status responses for the group of target users.

9. A method according to any preceding claim, wherein the response message comprises communications status information for a plurality of types of communication possible with the at least one target user.

10. A method according to Claim 8, wherein the plurality of types of communication possible with the at least one target user in combination define an available multiple-type communications path to the target user.

~~11. A method according to any preceding claim, further comprising adding a visual indication of the at least one user's availability for the specific type of communication to the user's contact information.~~

12. A method according to any preceding claim, further comprising adding the at least one user to a contact group of users.

13. A method according to Claim 12, further comprising creating a new contact group of users at the requesting user terminal and the adding step comprises adding the at least one user to the new contact group of users.

14. A method according to Claim 13, wherein the creating step and adding steps are implemented on a dynamic group, where membership of the group is based upon the current communication availability status of each user.

15. A method according to any preceding claim, wherein the receiving step comprises receiving in the response message the at least one user's current contact information for the specific communication type, the current contact information being provided by the status network element.

16. A method according to any preceding claim, further comprising modifying an image forming part of the target user's contact information such that the modified image includes an overlaid visual indication of the target user's availability for the specific type of communication.

17. A method according to Claim 16, wherein the modifying step comprises modifying the image to indicate that a plurality of different types of communication are available for the target user.

~~18. A method according to any preceding claim, wherein the specific~~

~~communication type comprises Voice over IP (VoIP).~~

19. A method according to any of Claims 1 to 17, wherein the specific communication type comprises instant messaging or multimedia messaging.

20. A method according to any of Claims 1 to 17, wherein the specific communication type comprises a GSM call.

21. A requesting communication user terminal for determining the availability of at least one remote target user for a specific type of communication, the terminal comprising:

A memory for storing contact information of a plurality of target users;

Retrieving means for retrieving contact information of at least one target user from the memory;

Transmitting means for transmitting a request for communication status information of the at least one target user to a status network element, the status network element being arranged to provide the communication status information regarding the availability of the target user for the specific type of communication, wherein the request comprises at least a portion of the contact information of the at least one target user and identifies the specific type of communication;

Receiving means for receiving, as a response to the request, a response message from the status network element, wherein the response message comprises the communication status information of the at least one target user; and

Modifying means for modifying at least a portion of stored contact information when the received status information indicates that the target user is available for communication via the specific communication type, such that the modified contact information indicates on the requesting user terminal the current availability of the at least one target user for communication via the specific communication type.

~~22. A terminal according to Claim 21, further comprising a set of~~

~~predetermined trigger events stored in the terminal, and sensing means~~
for sensing the occurrence of one of the predetermined trigger events in the operation of the user terminal, and in response thereto automatically activating the transmitting means to send the request for status information.

23. A terminal according to Claim 21 or 22, further comprising adding means for adding the at least one user to a stored contact group of users.

24. A terminal according to Claim 23, further comprising creating means for creating a new contact group of users at the requesting user terminal and wherein the adding means is arranged to add the at least one target user to the new contact group of users.

25. A terminal according to Claim 24, wherein the creating means and the adding means arranged to operate on a dynamic group, where membership of the group is based upon the current communication availability status of each target user.

26. A status network element for providing a communications availability status of a target networked user terminal for a specific type of communication channel, the status network element comprising:

a database of registered user entries, each registered user entry including status information about a particular type of communications channel, the status information comprising: the address of a registered user terminal within that channel and the status of the connection availability to the user terminal within the channel;

compiling means arranged to retrieve status information regarding a registered user from at least one networked communication element with
~~which the target user terminal is registered for a particular type of~~

~~communications and to store the same in the database;~~

receiving means arranged to receive a communications status request for a target user terminal and to retrieve the relevant registered user entry from the database; and

communications means for transmitting the retrieved communication status and network address of the target user terminal to a requesting user terminal for updating an communications availability status of the target user within a stored list of target users.

27. A status network element according to Claim 26, wherein the compiling means is arranged to generate a request message for retrieving the required status information, the request message being in a format supported by the networked communications element.

28. A system for determining availability of at least one target user for a specific communication type, wherein the system comprises:

a requesting communication user terminal according to Claim 21; and
a status network element according to Claim 26.

29. An application comprising program code means arranged to carry out the steps of the method defined in any one of Claims 1 to 20, when the program code means are loaded into the memory of and executed by a device capable of executing the application.

30. A device for communication comprising an application according to Claim 29.

Claims:

1. A method for use in a mobile communication terminal for determining current availability of a target user for real time two way communication via a specific communication channel connection type from a plurality of different communication channel connection types associated with the target user, the method comprising:

retrieving contact information of the target user from a contact information database stored in a memory of the mobile communications terminal of a requesting user:

sending a request for communication status information of the target user to a status network element, the status network element being arranged to provide the communication status information regarding the availability of the target user for communication via the specific communication channel connection type, wherein the request comprises at least a portion of the contact information of the target user and identifies the specific communication channel connection type;

receiving, as a response to the request, a response message from the status network element, wherein the response message comprises the communication status information of the target user;

accessing the contact information database and modifying the contact information database by modifying at least a portion of the stored contact information stored in the contact information database such that the modified contact information indicates the current availability of the target user for the real time two way communication via the specific communication channel connection type; and

retrieving the contact information for the target user from the contact information database and displaying the contact information for the target user, on the requesting user mobile communications terminal,

wherein displaying the contact information comprises:

displaying a plurality of numbers or addresses each providing a separate communication channel connection type for the target user, including displaying the current availability information for the target user for

the specific communication channel connection type, from the plurality of numbers or addresses;

adding a visual indication of the user's availability for communication according to the specific communication channel connection type to the user's contact information; and

modifying an image forming part of the user's contact information such that the modified image includes a visual indication of the user's availability for communication according to the specific communication channel telephonic connection type;

wherein said method is performed by a contact management application in the mobile communications terminal, wherein the contact management application is independent of each of the plurality of different communication channel connection types, and wherein the contact management application is triggered to perform said method by a predetermined trigger event in the mobile communications terminal.

2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the method further comprises sending the request for status information as a response to storing new contact information into the memory of the user terminal.

3. A method according to claim 1, wherein the method further comprises sending a plurality of the requests for status information as a group.

4. A method according to claim 1, wherein the method further comprises receiving a plurality of the response messages as a group.

5. A method according to claim 1, wherein the method further comprises adding the user to a contact group.

6. A method according to claim 1, wherein the method further comprises receiving in the response message the user's contact information corresponding to the specific communication channel connection type, wherein the network element is further arranged to provide said contact

information corresponding to the specific communication channel connection type.

7. A method according to claim 5, wherein the method further comprises creating a new contact group and adding the target user to the new contact group.

8. A method according to claim 1, wherein the specific telephonic connection type comprises a Voice over IP (VoIP) channel.

9. A method according to claim 1, wherein the specific communication channel connection type comprises a GSM call channel.

10. A system for determining the current availability of a target user for real time two way communication via a specific communication channel connection type from a plurality of different communication channel connection types associated with the target user, the system comprising a user mobile communications terminal and a status network element, wherein the user mobile communications terminal itself comprises a memory storing a contact information database, a contact management application, and a processor:

wherein the contact management application is independent of each of the plurality of different communication channel connection types, and wherein when triggered by a predetermined trigger event in the mobile communications terminal, the processor runs the contact management application to perform the following functions:

retrieval of contact information of the target user from the contact information database;

sending a request for communication status information of the target user to the status network element, the status network element being arranged to provide the communication status information regarding the availability of the target user for communication via the specific communication channel connection type, wherein the request comprises at

least a portion of the contact information of the target user and identifies the specific communication channel connection type;

receiving, as a response to the request, a response message from the status network element, wherein the response message comprises the communication status information of the target user; and

accessing the contact information database and modifying the contact information database by modifying at least a portion of the stored contact information stored in the contact information database such that the modified contact information indicates the current availability of the target user for real time two way communication via the specific communication channel telephonic connection type; and

retrieving the contact information for the target user from the contact information database and displaying the contact information for the target user, on the requesting user mobile communications terminal,

wherein displaying the contact information comprises displaying a plurality of numbers or addresses each providing a separate communication channel connection type for the target user, including displaying the current availability information for the target user for the specific communication channel connection type;

adding a visual indication of the user's availability for communication according to the specific communication channel connection type to the user's contact information; and

modifying an image forming part of the user's contact information such that the modified image includes a visual indication of the user's availability for communication according to the specific communication channel telephonic connection type.

11. A system according to claim 10, wherein the status network element is adapted to retrieve the status information from a database.

12. A system according to claim 10, wherein the status network element further is adapted to request the status information from another network element.

13. A system according to claim 12, wherein the status network element further generates a request message in a format supported by the other network element.