

Apeer: Social Visualization of Brief, Topical Discussions

Apeer is a social visualization for brief, topical discussions within groups. It builds common ground and creates social awareness by showing who is online as well as what has been read and commented on. The peripheral interface emphasizes what's most important by sinking unread topics and shows trails of activity to indicate what's popular.

Posting a Topic

Large circles represent topics, submitted by the person corresponding to the color of the circle.

Visualizing Levels of Interest

A column of smaller circles is a reverse chronologically-ordered visualization of group interest in a particular topic. The higher the column, the more activity and interest.

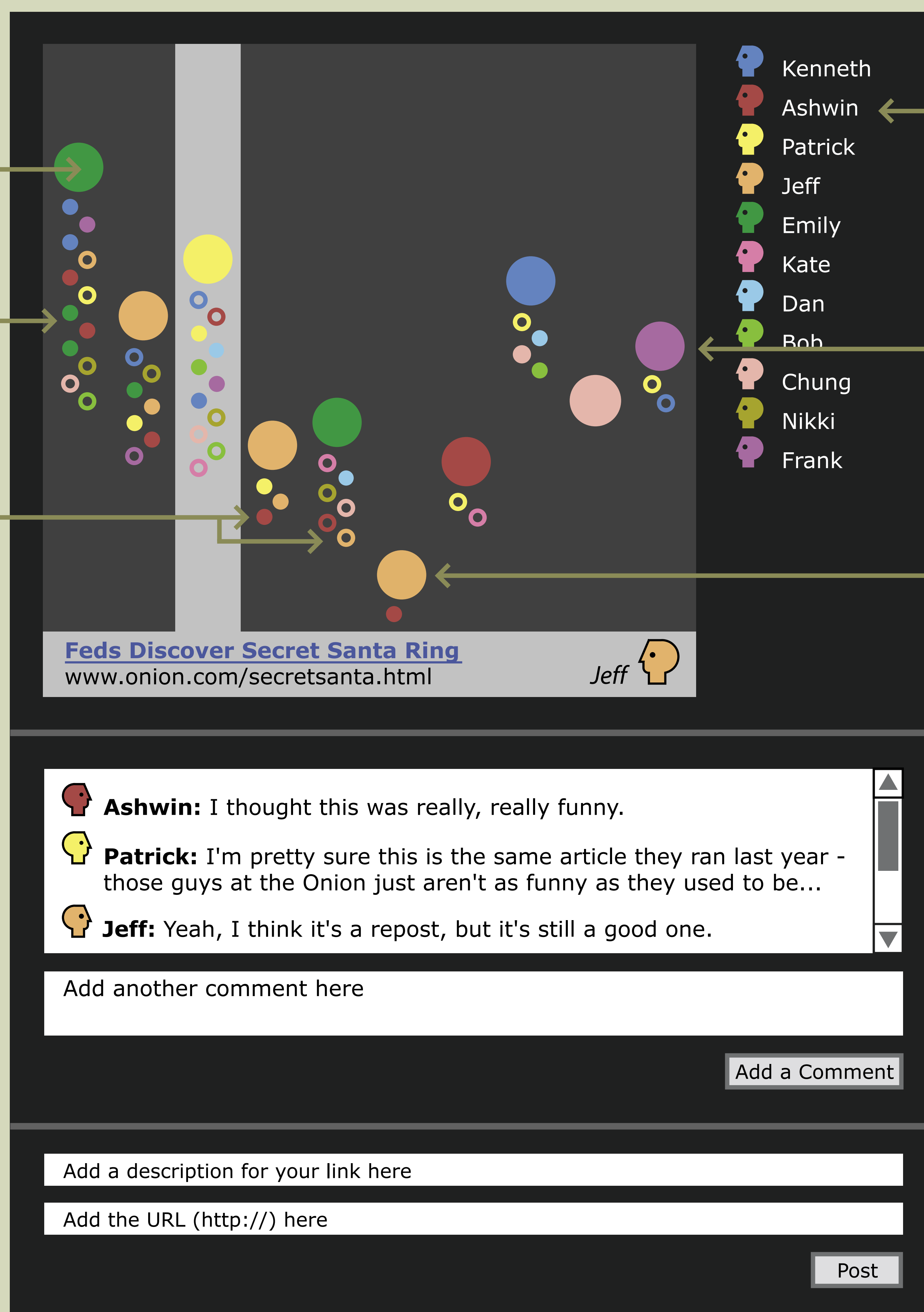
Comments and Common Ground

Solid circles represent comments made about the topic. An empty circle appears when a person clicks on the posted link to read it in their web browser. Showing who's read what increases the common ground within the group.

Evaluation

We facilitated two user groups in interface testing. Group A, with 12 participants, varied in the degree of personal familiarity among the users, while Group B's 8 participants all knew each other well. The activity in Group A consisted of users sharing casual information that resulted in a larger number of topics, but superficial comments. There were fewer topics in Group B, but a higher volume of comments per topic.

In both groups, users were more apt to post comments on the more timely submissions. Participants reported feelings of social connectedness even when the interface was in their periphery. Some felt a sense of ownership, even competition, when monitoring the volume of activity surrounding a topic they submitted.



Presence Indication

Users have their icon color turned on if they are currently logged on, otherwise their color is off. The group is closed and participants generally know each other. This allows for manageable exchanges of information.

Order of Entry

Topics are introduced in a timeline fashion: new topics are inserted on the right and move left as they get older. This leverages people's conceptual understanding of timelines and allows users to glance at the interface to look for newest topics.

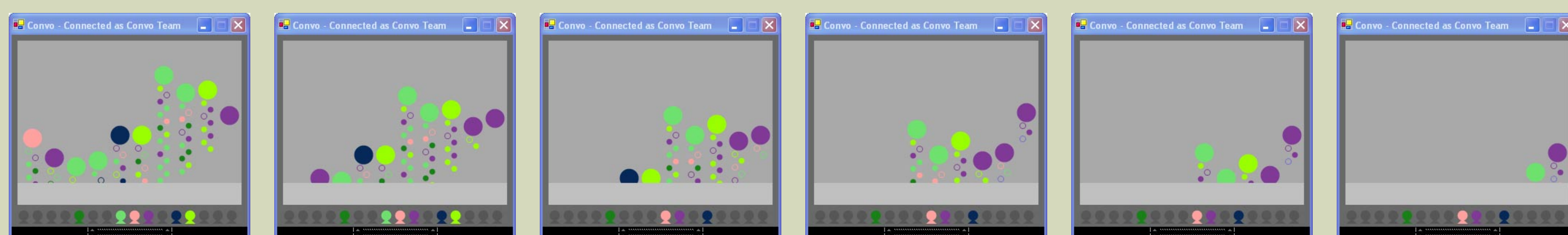
Topics Disappear Over Time

Only the 10 latest topics will remain visible at any given time. If a topic receives little interest or activity, it sinks to the bottom of the screen and eventually disappears. Older topics are pushed off-screen on the left.

Topic Contents

Users can submit topics with or without a corresponding URL and, in future versions, multimedia content.

Time Lapse: An Hour and a Half in Apeer



The end of a day of active posting, reading, and commenting. Posts without ongoing social activity sink until they disappear offscreen.