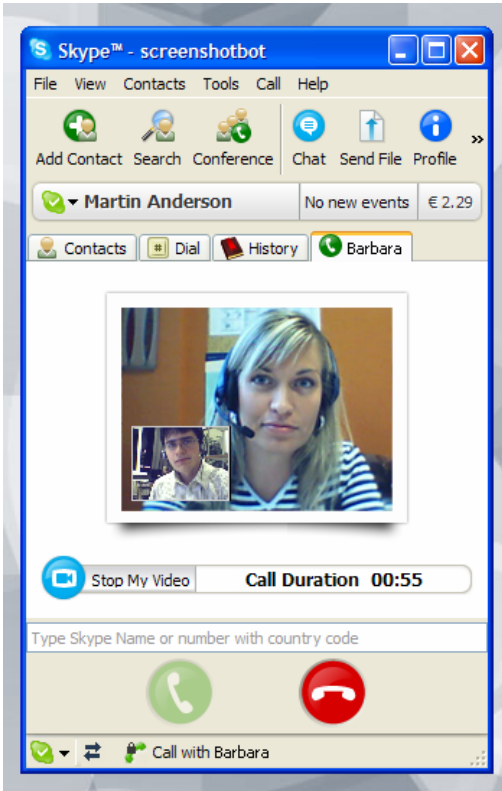


## BLUEWATER SKYPE by Joe Minick

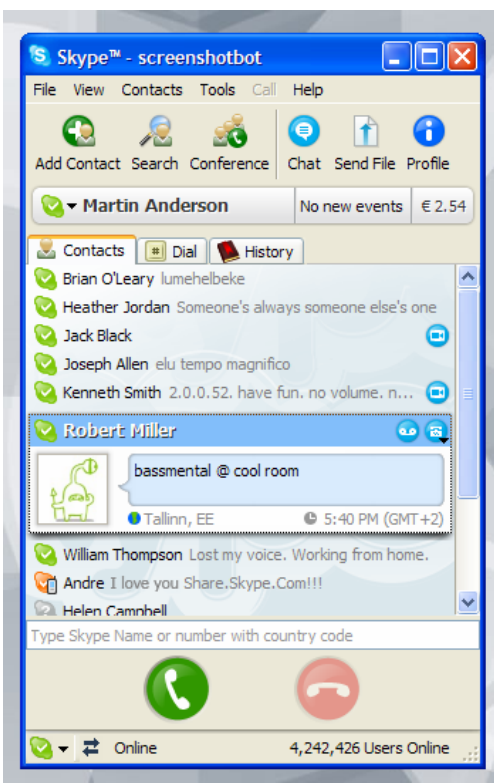
Neither fish nor fowl, Skype is a VOIP or Voice Over the Internet Protocol network that's rapidly found a home in the cruising community. The price is right, free to download and free to use. Maybe that says something about all of us in the cruising community but its also popular because after several years and as many disappointments with other internet calling networks, Skype really works. Like so many others, we have easily fallen into the habit of calling home from anywhere in the world on the computer to talk to family members or friends without any thought to the cost because there is none. With so many cruisers on the Skype network, we keep up with old friends and new acquaintances as they go their separate ways and free calls to or from any port in the world are just as easy as calling home.



Skype Video Call

In a nutshell, Skype connects two computers together via the internet for voice communications complete with live video if you like. To get started, you'll need a computer with internet capability and Skype software installed. If the computer has a built-in microphone and speakers, you're all set. If not you'll need to add headset with a microphone that you can plug into the computers audio jacks. You may want too anyway as some built-in mikes and speakers aren't the best. Low volume, poor sound quality and feedback or echoing are the most common problems. If you want to take advantage of video calling you will also need a need a webcam attached to the computer. Most of these gadgets have a built-in microphone and the better ones do a nice job of eliminating echoing or feedback when speakers are used instead of a headset. Of course, the catch is that the person you are calling must have the same computer setup connected to the internet and running Skype software.

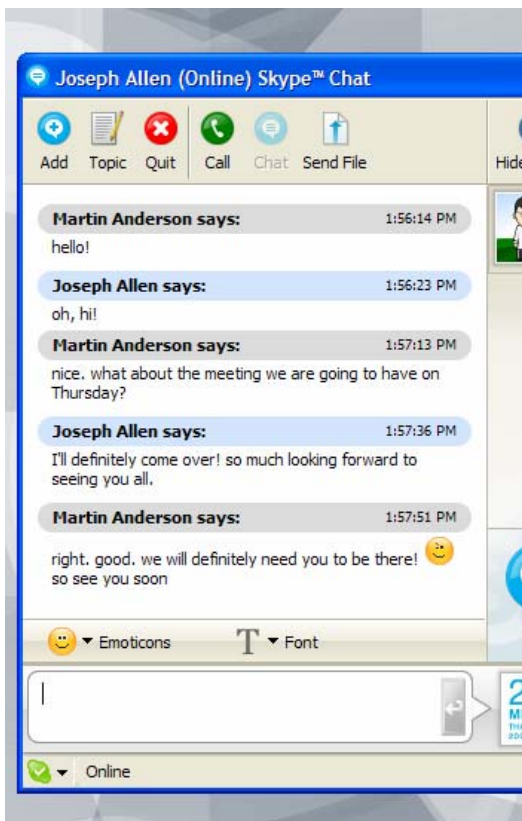
The Skype network has many features that make it about as close to a traditional telephone system as you can get. When a call comes in, the computer rings just like a telephone but clicking the answer icon is required before your conversation can begin. Skype relies on contact names instead of phone numbers and there's no phone book. You can search the Skype network for Skype users by name or contact name, if you already know it. Contact names you have acquired are kept in a list on your computer and placing a call is done by clicking on the contact name. Because the person you are trying to call may not always be connected to the internet, Skype keeps track of all your contacts and displays their status beside the contact name in your directory. A quick look will tell you whether they can be reached via Skype at any particular moment.



Skype Contact List

If the person you are trying to reach isn't online at the moment or even if they are, you can use Skype's message or chat mode to type a message. It functions as a standard interactive chat mode so you can type messages back and forth but if the recipient isn't online, messages are stored and delivered the next time they are connected to the internet. A pop up message signals the arrival of a message and chat messages can be entered while you are talking. It's a convenient way to send an address or other information being discussed and you can also cut and paste information from another document to send as a Skype message. A feature we really like is Skype's ability to send and receive files. It's a nice way to receive pictures from home or send your own pictures to someone. There are no size limitations and the file transfer requires no attention after its initiated and accepted at the destination. Large files or pictures can take awhile if you have a slow internet connection but its not uncommon to receive a picture from someone during a conversation and be looking at while you're still talking.

Skype has several options that aren't free but quite reasonably priced. For €15 a year you can purchase voice mail. It functions like any other answering machine when you miss a call but it also lets you leave a voice message for any Skype contact that you call, even if they don't subscribe to voice mail themselves. Skype Out is a feature that allows a call to be placed to a standard telephone number anywhere in the world. The price of the call is determined by the location you call, regardless of your own location. You must subscribe in advance and maintain a balance that the price of a call can be deducted from. The entire price of the subscription goes toward paying for calls and placing a call to a number in the UK from anywhere in the world costs 1.7 cents a minute.



**Skype Chat Mode**

There are a few caveats and limitations to consider. Calls between computers spanning half of the globe may not always have the same quality of sound that you're used to on a standard phone, although they often do. Skype Out and Skype In calls don't seem to be affected by this phenomenon as often. A high speed internet connection isn't really required and I have had quite acceptable conversations with folks using a dial up connection, but sometimes quality suffers a bit. Skype software is available for Mac, Linux, Pocket PC and MS Windows operating systems but Skype for Windows isn't supposed to work on Windows 95 or 98 but I had good results with it when I tested it on a Windows 98 operating system. No guarantees here. Skype may not take your credit card online if you are out of the country the card is issued in but they do accept payment via Pay Pal. I routinely use Skype with a wifi internet connection to a laptop onboard and it works well if the wifi signal strength isn't too low.

Skype is known and used throughout most of the world and there are some obvious security issues. Don't include anything except very generic information about yourself in the Skype profile. Many users just enter their country or leave it blank. It can be viewed by any user and may make you the target of solicitation or worse if you include your mailing address and home phone number. Skype software gives the user the option of choosing the privacy level for Skype's operation. I highly recommend that you only accept calls and messages from people on your contact list. This keeps solicitors all over the world from contacting you after they have looked you up in the Skype online directory. If a new caller wants to reach you, Skype will send you a message asking if you want to add the new caller to your contact list. Skype provides updates to the software occasionally and installation is seamlessly smooth. Your contact list and configuration is maintained during the installation.

Skype out rates are available to virtually every country in the world and Skype is available in virtually every language

Download Skype software and get complete information about Skype at <http://www.skype.com/>

**Selected Skype Out Calling Rates ----- charges per minute**

<b>Destination</b>	<b>EURO excl. VAT</b>	<b>Destination</b>	<b>EURO excl. VAT</b>
Afghanistan	€0.288	Denmark	€0.017
Algeria	€0.136	Dominican Republic	€0.017
Antigua Barbuda	€0.146	Finland	€0.025
Argentina	€0.026	France	€0.017
Argentina - Mobile	€0.140	Germany	€0.017
Argentina-Buenos Aires	€0.017	Greece	€0.017
Argentina-Cordoba	€0.017	Ireland	€0.017
Australia	€0.017	India	€0.017
Australia-Sydney	€0.017	Italy	€0.017
Austria	€0.017	Martinique	€0.240
Bahamas	€0.072	Mexico	€0.080
Barbados	€0.162	Spain	€0.017
Belguim	€0.017	Turkey	€0.111
Bolivia	€0.120	Turkey-Mobile	€0.173
Brazil	€0.044	Turkey-Istanbul	€0.055
Canada	€0.017	United Kingdom	€0.017
Chile	€0.017	United States	€0.017
Columbia	€0.077	Virgin Islands, British	€0.097
Costa Rica	€0.052		