IBM Goal: IM Interop Across The Board

By Barbara Darrow, CRN   3:00 PM EST Fri. Jan. 27, 2006

At Lotusphere, last week, IBM for the first time pledged client support to Linux and Macintosh for its Sametime realtime communications offering.

Sametime 7.5, due this summer, also will offer users the option of free interoperability between their enterprise instant messaging (IM) networks and the public America Online, Yahoo, Google Talk and iChat IM networks. Microsoft charges about $12 a head for similar interop between its Live Communications Server and Yahoo, MSN and AOL networks.

Additionally, the upcoming Notes 7.02 client will support the latest Macintosh operating system starting in the third quarter. The Domino Web Access client will support both PowerPC and Intel-based Macs via Firefox.

"We've been the leaders in collaboration for 15 years and have no intention of backing down," said Mike Rhodin, general manager of IBM's Workplace, Portal and Collaboration group.

Solution providers said customers often wrestle with IM interoperability. For the sake of security, Sametime 7.5 will not allow file transfers or multiuser chats with people outside the Sametime network, said David Marshak, senior product manager for IBM's realtime products.

David Ferris, president of researcher Ferris Networks, said Sametime interoperability with the public networks is important, and Macintosh client support is likewise key for a critical constituency. IBM will have "strong cross-platform support, which Microsoft is not likely to offer," Ferris noted. Some said IBM still must clarify the distinction between Workplace and Notes/Domino. Statements by IBM in the past led many to believe that Notes/Domino had been dead-ended. Workplace Managed Client 2.6 offers server-managed and provisioned applications to a variety of desktops or even kiosks for workers without PCs, providing collaboration and mail.

"Workplace is a response to SharePoint, but I think it's still confusing," said Steve Chan, vice president of ZipLip, a San Jose, Calif., IBM partner. "On the plus side, IBM's done good work to solidify its positioning and tell people, 'If [you're] on Domino, stay on Domino. If you're a smaller company and looking at Workplace, go in that direction.' "