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Fast Forwarding your Business with Instant Messaging

By Lee Traupel

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Instant Messaging is rapidly becoming accepted in the business community as a viable communications tool and process – it's faster than e-mail, free on the client side, even a novice user can easily grasp the interface in just a few minutes and it enables remote workers and business partners to "talk" and share files and information effortlessly using the in-place infrastructure of the internet. Its mushrooming in popularity too – according to IDC, corporate and general business users will jump from 5.5M in 2001 to close to 200M by 2004.

What are some of the pitfalls and concerns you need to have when assessing and integrating Instant Messaging ("IM" another biz acronym) with your business processes? Be aware you are sending clear text messages over the public Internet – so all IM technology is inherently insecure. Privacy issues can also be raised – these messages are typically archived via the IM servers of the company whose services you are using and can be made public at a later date. Anyone with a network scanner may have access to and be reading your messages and if your are downloading files, you need to ensure your anti-virus software is setup to scan these files when you open them.

One of the biggest pitfalls of the technology and process is that it adds another communications layer to your busy day – but you can offset this by selecting or filtering who you communicate with at any point by using the IM interface to block all or selected individuals from "seeing" you when you are online.

Finally, like all things in today's computer industry (or many) each of the Instant Messaging vendors are trying to build applications which don't integrate with the other (no surprise here – arrogance has not faded away in the business community!). So, you need to assess the installed base of the market leaders and make a decision on which company's product you want to utilized – my recommendation would be to review Microsoft's or AOL/Time Warner's products – their installed bases are in the 200 million users plus when combined (these numbers include consumer and business usage) and they both work well and have user interfaces that are intuitive.

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There is one alternative company that is solving the "IM Tower of Babel" issues and claims to integrate well with all proprietary apps by utilizing XML technology, Jabber, Inc., www.jabber.com So, if interoperability is important to you then I would recommend assessing their products.

Most of the IM providers including Microsoft are integrating voice communications with their IM clients – you may be able to bypass your local telephone carrier at some point using this technology, but don't bet on it anytime soon – all of those lobbyists here in the states need to keep generating fees on behalf of their telecom clients in Washington D.C. We use Microsoft's IM product and we have upon occasion utilized the voice and video features (you must of course have a multimedia setup for your PC and camera) and they do work. Although the video quality is a little jerky and the voice is akin to the old Citizens Band ("CB") radio – your Internet connection impacts the quality of both.

Whose technology do you choose? There are some clear market leaders in the Instant Messaging

marketing including Microsoft (no surprise here) <http://messenger.microsoft.com> But, like most Microsoft technology/tools you pay a price for the software/services, albeit a small one. You have to register with Microsoft's NET Passport www.microsoft.com/myservices/passport service which is designed to be a universal login – this only takes a few minutes but be forewarned they also try to get you to setup a Hot Mail account, but you can work around this.

The other dominant IM product is AOL's ICQ product

– it has similar functionality as

Microsoft's application. The original technology was developed by a great Israeli company, Mirabellis, Inc., subsequently acquired by AOL. My chief complaint with this product is the irritating banner ads that AOL keeps pushing at you when you are utilizing their product. But, it's a small price to pay for a free product on the client side.

Yahoo also has an IM product ("Yahoo Messenger") but I am not convinced this will stay as a core part of their business, as they appear to be still trying to figure out what they are going to become in the post ".com gold rush era" market; i.e. Portal, Directory, Media giant, software/services company, etc. And, they've certainly jettisoned parts of their business the last 12–18 months and I would wager they've had discussions about getting out of the IM business.

Finally, IM is also quickly moving into other markets and devices including PDAs and Pagers – if you're a real geek and you can't stand to be out of touch while your in the shower and you have a water proof device you can ping away. But, I think we all need some down time for friends and family, but wanted to make sure I covered all possible bases with this column – until next time!

Lee Traupel has 20 plus years of business development and marketing experience – he is the founder of Intellective Communications, Inc.,

a results–driven marketing services

company providing proprietary services to clients encompassing startups to public companies.
Lee@inteleactive.com

Instant Messages or Instant Messengers?

By Dee Scrip

Instant Messages or Instant Messengers? by Dee Scrip

Many vendors offering Instant Messaging (IM) services have added new capabilities such as voice messaging and file sharing. Among others, AOL, Microsoft, and Yahoo offer these IM services.

Clients of Instant Messaging services are also easy prey for the community of hackers. Using a simple monitoring program, the plain text from Instant Messaging can be easily captured and creates vulnerability to electronic eavesdropping.

In one version of AOL's Instant Messenger, aka AIM, a user was found to have been the target of a hacker attack. The villainous hacker had crafted a URL which, when clicked by the user with AIM on their desktop, allowed the hacker to execute a virus on the victim's system. What is particularly sinister about this is that AIM does not have to be running for this type of virus to be deployed.

Another avenue of attack is when victims are simply sent an HTML email with a link that when clicked will execute one or all of the following: a privilege elevation attack, a denial of service attack, or the installation of a backdoor for later use, to name a few.

Using a computer phone service that operates on secure lines with high end encryption codec on proprietary patented technology that features IM capability will optimally protect you against these vicious hacker attacks.

By Dee Scrip

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The above information is an excerpt taken from an in-depth and exclusive Report entitled "Why Hackers Love Computer Phones - A Shocking Report You Must Read!" available only at <http://www.whypay4calls.com/gtp/to.pl?l=ART-01>

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