

## IBM's Open Ajax Brings New Twist to a Competitive Maneuver

Ray Valdes, David Mitchell Smith, David W. Cearley, Daryl C. Plummer, Gene Phifer, Mark Driver

The Open Ajax project ties together Eclipse development software with open-source Ajax toolkits. It's a modest start, but it's also a well-conceived maneuver that meets a real need for leadership in this space.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

---

### Event

On 1 February 2006, IBM announced Open Ajax, an initiative to combine the Eclipse integrated development environment (IDE) with a number of Ajax toolkits.

### Analysis

For IBM, this is a tactical move that tries to exploit the rapidly growing momentum in Ajax. The Open Ajax initiative is a competitive maneuver of the kind that IBM and Microsoft have performed so well before — designed to create a playing field on which small players pursue their agendas and self-interest. Ideally, the big vendor adds stability and coherence, the small players add value and innovation, the users and developers benefit because of network effects, and, of course, the big vendor's franchise is solidified. The difference between IBM's version and Microsoft's version of the maneuver is the major role played here by open-source software (OSS) in Eclipse, Mozilla and several OSS Ajax toolkits (Dojo, openrico, Zimbra and others still to come).

In the announcement, the pure OSS toolkits appeared to be more prominent than the other participants (Borland Software, Novell, BEA Systems, Oracle and Google). Conspicuously absent were commercial Ajax vendors such as Tibco Software, JackBe and Backbase Software, as well as non-Ajax vendors such as Adobe, vendor of Macromedia Flex. The initial set is a good start, but wider participation is needed for this to become strategic.

IBM is playing a leadership role in a fragmented space, one that can benefit from a vendor pursuing broad interests that benefit the overall category. The announcement also bolsters Eclipse's standing as one of the two main IDEs (along with Microsoft's Visual Studio).

IBM's technology investment is thus far modest. The coupling is loose, with no attempt to standardize toolkits, only the connection to the IDE. The enhancements to Eclipse, although minor, have value even for developers not using Ajax. Left unspecified is how Open Ajax fits into other IBM product groups, such as Rational Software, Workplace and WebSphere. Ajax-enabled Eclipse seems lightweight compared with offerings from Ajax-focused vendors (although they support just one toolkit). Over time, Gartner expects to see a richer technology layer between Eclipse and the toolkits.

### Recommendations

- Toolkit authors should consider integrating with Eclipse through the IBM-defined mechanism.
- Vendors of non-Ajax rich Internet applications need to detail a strategy to coexist with Ajax.
- Web developers should evaluate Ajax, initially in a tactical way, and coupled with investment in a design process centered on usability.

**Analytical Sources:** Ray Valdes, David Mitchell Smith, David Cearley, Daryl Plummer, Gene Phifer and Mark Driver, Gartner Research

### Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Adopting Ajax Means Choosing From Four Levels of Ajax Technology" — Organizations that incorporate Ajax in their Web development projects must select from

four levels of technology, each with its own set of risks, rewards and trade-offs. **By Ray Valdes**

- "Myths About Google's 'Ajax' Technology" — Google's client-side technology initiatives have garnered much industry praise, but Google has been given too much praise for techniques that are not new, and too little credit for genuine innovations in usability and server-side processing. **By Ray Valdes**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access the documents referenced in this First Take.)

## REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS

---

### Corporate Headquarters

56 Top Gallant Road  
Stamford, CT 06902-7700  
U.S.A.  
+1 203 964 0096

### European Headquarters

Tamesis  
The Glanty  
Egham  
Surrey, TW20 9AW  
UNITED KINGDOM  
+44 1784 431611

### Asia/Pacific Headquarters

Gartner Australasia Pty. Ltd.  
Level 9, 141 Walker Street  
North Sydney  
New South Wales 2060  
AUSTRALIA  
+61 2 9459 4600

### Japan Headquarters

Gartner Japan Ltd.  
Aobadai Hills, 6F  
7-7, Aobadai, 4-chome  
Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-0042  
JAPAN  
+81 3 3481 3670

### Latin America Headquarters

Gartner do Brazil  
Av. das Nações Unidas, 12551  
9º andar—World Trade Center  
04578-903—São Paulo SP  
BRAZIL  
+55 11 3443 1509