

Microsoft Pushes Interoperability With XMPP Support

David Mario Smith

Microsoft's long-delayed support for the XMPP protocol in its Office Communications Server product line is a competitive move aimed at strengthening its OCS base as it moves forward with UCC initiatives.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 1 October, Microsoft announced an Extensible Messaging and Presence Protocol (XMPP) gateway for Office Communications Server (OCS) 2007 R2 and free federation with AOL and Windows Live for customers of its Public Instant Messaging Connectivity (PIC) gateway.

Analysis

Cross-vendor interoperability between instant messaging (IM) and presence solutions has been a long-sought-after IT goal, made more difficult to attain by vendors' tendency to standardize on their own proprietary protocols. Limited federation by IM providers such as IBM and Microsoft was one of the reasons behind IM adoption stalling out at below 50%. Microsoft's announcement that it will offer a free XMPP gateway in OCS R2 signifies that interoperability and open standards will be the subject of the next round of competition among vendors in the unified communications and collaboration (UCC) market.

Until now, Microsoft was the only major UCC vendor that lacked an XMPP gateway. IBM already had one solely for accessing Google Talk and other XMPP-based servers. (IBM's Sametime gateway offers federated connectivity between Sametime 8 and OCS.) XMPP is the protocol behind Google Talk and the Jabber Extensible Communications Platform (XCP) IM and presence platform that Cisco acquired in 2008. Gartner believes the XMPP gateway announcement is a competitive move by Microsoft aimed at Cisco and Google. Through it, Microsoft hopes to strengthen its OCS base as it moves forward with UCC initiatives.

Cisco found Jabber attractive partly because of its strong traction in the government and financial services market segments. Organizations with established Jabber communities have had no native way to communicate with OCS environments, which has been an issue in government and financial services organizations that also use Microsoft Exchange and OCS. (Microsoft acquired Parlano in 2007 because of its traction in financial services as well for its persistent chat capabilities.) The new Microsoft XMPP gateway will enable Google Talk users and Cisco/Jabber XCP users to communicate with Microsoft OCS users.

Microsoft says that its XMPP gateway will be available for free download and fees for federation with AOL and Windows Live users via the PIC gateway will be eliminated. Microsoft customers federating with AOL and Yahoo have mentioned PIC pricing as one of their pain points, as PIC entailed a separate provisioning process and monthly fee. As Yahoo has not agreed to a similar deal with Microsoft, there will be a fee for Yahoo Messenger federation, although the price of PIC licensing will be reduced by 50%.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **OCS R2 customers in mixed environments with Jabber XCP or other XMPP-based IM servers:** Download the XMPP gateway and test the federation capabilities for interoperability.
- **All enterprises:** Insist that any IM providers you are considering offer support for major IM protocols, such as XMPP and Session Initiation Protocol/Session Initiation Protocol for Instant Messaging and Presence Leveraging Extensions (SIP/SIMPLE).

RECOMMENDED READING

- "Instant Messaging Federation Revisited: Is It Working?"— Federation currently is the best alternative for connecting with business partners that have differing IM systems, but it has several shortcomings that entail certain risks. **By David Mario Smith**
- "MarketScope for Enterprise Instant Messaging and Presence" — As enterprise IM products mature, they have become a leverage point for vendors seeking to position themselves in the UCC space. **By David Mario Smith**

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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