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Microsoft in the Telephony Middle—Again

By: Ellen Muraskin
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Microsoft's presence-aware, IM interface to any communications endpoint, from chat to video calling, is already a feature of the major IP PBXes.

Microsoft in the Telephony Middle—Again -

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Someone who also worked for Harry once explained to me that the idea behind Windows middleware was to fit all the devices—like printers, scanners and modems—to all the applications and just stand in the middle of the money stream with a big net.

By planting its IM and presence platform in the middle of an enterprise communications network and offering APIs to others legacy or IP PBXes, gateways and media servers, as well as its own VOIP clients in "Istanbul," I can see Microsoft continuing in this tradition. In doing so, it will be offering its partners a huge user base in the form of users of its dominant desktop.

Several companies have already jumped on this invitation: At VON, Radvision announced that it would integrate its multipoint audio/video conference unit and gatekeeper with LCS. Broadsoft announced its intention to integrate its advanced call-feature server and GUI. Jasomi networks its PeerPoint session border controller for endpoint-to-endpoint control over encryption, call logging, and firewall transversal.

While Microsoft lines up its partners for VOIP, it was equally clear at VON that the IP PBX vendors themselves—who have worked in their own presence—and IM integrations are largely defecting from Windows, or at least giving customers that option. Wendy Bohling, presenting for Avaya at the IP "PBX shoot-out" presentation at VON, listed the reasons behind Avayas offering Communications Manager in Linux as being the desire to minimize virus threats, freedom from worry about constant patches, and the convenience of one user image. Nortel will offer its Business Communications Manager in Linux, Cisco its Call Manager, and 3Com its NBX.

It will be interesting to see if and how Microsoft succeeds in pressing its desktop advantage. Istanbul clients will perform as soft phones within the enterprise, probably even wirelessly on Windows-running handhelds. Add a gateway to the system and theyll call anywhere. But they dont now have the wide range of features of PBX phones. And telecom and IT managers obviously show reluctance to bet the office phone system on Windows. Indeed, Anoop Gupta, announcing Istanbul, said that Microsoft does not make PBXes.

So at this point, the question is this: If the IP PBXes have found their own

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presence/IM solutions, how does LCS earn its keep? Perhaps enterprises get it for secure IM and presence, and use it and its soft-phone capability in parallel with an existing legacy gatewayed PBX. Perhaps they get it to make use of already purchased XP licenses, to be used as soft extensions at home and abroad.

What other ROIs call for LCS in the middle? Feel free to tell me your thoughts.

Technology Editor Ellen Muraskin can be reached at Ellen_Muraskin@ziffdavis.com.

VOIP/Telecom Topic Center Editor Ellen Muraskin has been observing and illuminating the murky intersection of computer intelligence and telephony since 1993. She reaches for her VOIP line when the rain makes her POTS line buzz.

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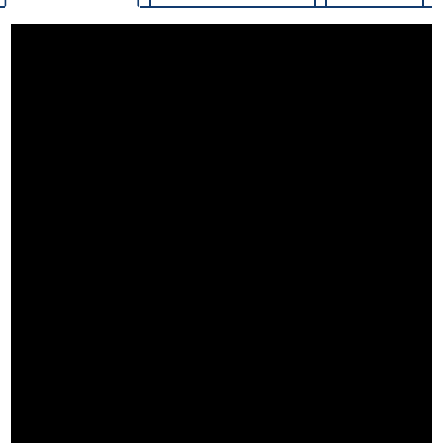
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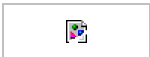
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