

Hotmail banks on speed for better service

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It's free and available worldwide, but Hotmail isn't known for its speedy access. What's more, if you're a dialup internet user, particularly in a developing country, the situation is worse. But the seemingly endless wait for Hotmail connectivity will soon be over, or at least the company is hoping.

Sabeer Bhatia, co-founder of the free Web-based e-mail service that was sold to Microsoft for \$400 million in 1998, is back again with a plan to speed up access to the system.

Bhatia says his new software, called BlogEverywhere Hotmail Accelerator, available free at www.blogeverywhere.com, is the first software for Hotmail that accelerates the Web mail service by pre-fetching e-mails into cache so that a user doesn't have to wait for e-mails to download after clicking on them.

"BlogEverywhere Hotmail Accelerator starts downloading the emails intelligently in the background," said Bhatia. "So while a user browses through the email overview page most of the top emails of the day have already started downloading and will open in entirety as the user clicks on them."

Hotmail Accelerator also contains enhancing features, claims Bhatia, that include a preview facility allowing users to preview e-mails before actually opening them, and sign out with cache cleared. This is yet another special feature of the software in the sense that if a user accesses e-mails from public terminals like library computers or cyber cafes then this script ensures that e-mails are not left in the browser cache.

Moreover, the software makes operations that take many clicks to be now available at just one click. For instance, opening e-mails in a new window, reply, delete, mark and similar operations could be done with just a single click.

This software, which was launched today in India, is a version meant only for Hotmail, but in the next few months versions for other similar services like Yahoo! and Google's e-mail systems will be ready, too.

"There is no collaboration with Microsoft yet," said Bhatia, "it is too early; they do not even know about it." But he did not rule out the possibility of a future collaboration either.

Bhatia, who many feel is re-booting himself after the resounding flop of Arzoo.com, the online portal he had set up after selling off Hotmail, says that besides this software he is also working on a slew of other "innovative" offerings.

One that has already been launched is a Voice over Internet Protocol solution, developed by his new company called VoiFi Technology Corp,

based in California. This new product called "VoiFi" is next-generation communication software that provides superior quality Internet telephony services as well as entertainment.

"VoiFi is unique software which combines some of the most advanced concepts in Internet based technologies, such as Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) and Peer-to-Peer (P2P)," says Bhatia.

SIP is a signaling protocol for Internet telephony, conferencing, presence, event notification, and instant messaging. A P2P network relies on the computing power and bandwidth of the participant nodes in the network largely through ad-hoc connections rather than concentrating all the "network" functions on a few centralized servers.

In short, this means that VoiFi allows our users to not only send instant text messages to any other online user (even while talking with them) but also invite other users to join the chat session.

It also means that if one needs to send say an address, a phone number, or a large piece of text while talking to someone, one can simply send them an instant message. One can also add unique "emoticons" such as graphic smiley faces to messages.

Unlike instant messaging, VoiFi allows users to send a text message to other users even when they are offline. This means that the receiver gets to view pending messages and respond to them through either a live chat (if the sender is online) or a response message.

VoiFi comes bundled with a full-featured voicemail that enables users to leave voice messages for others. Additionally, VoiFi provides voice messaging through which users can send each other voice messages (similar to text messages) regardless of whether the recipients are online. "This promotes efficiency in communication where not every interaction

need be online." In other words, VoiFi empowers its users to manage their time and control their own mode of communication.

The gaming capabilities of this software, according to Bhatia, differentiates VoiFi from other competing product like Microsoft's MSN Messenger and Skype, the new VoIP free software that has raised quite a furor globally.

"The games at the moment are very India specific games right now but we will be expanding adding other games to that product soon," said Bhatia.

VoiFi is right now only available for free PC-to-PC use, but soon there will be a version that will allow a user to make a phone call from a PC to any phone in India for as little as 2 cents a minute. Competing products like Skype charge 14 cents a minute for similar service.

"VoiFi too is more India-centric at the moment which also means that we can have the best deals with termination providers and we can afford to offer lowest rates because we have the lowest cost of termination," said Bhatia.

According to him, VoiFi too is suited best for developing countries where low-bandwidth problems at the last mile of connectivity pose a big hindrance to similar products. "We have made the software so efficient with our own codex, which we can operate on any Internet connection over a speed of just 18 kilobits per second," he said.

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