

IBM, 3Com Collaborate on VOIP

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IBM and 3Com on March 26 will launch new collaboration features and further application integration for their joint System i IP Telephony Express Edition offering.

The two vendors are integrating IP telephony with e-mail, messaging and core business process applications in a new offering based on IBM's System i server platform. The System i Integrated Collaboration offering adds new unified messaging, contact center capabilities, integration with Lotus Sametime 7.5 and a 3Com software development kit on top of 3Com's VCX IP telephony software running on the IBM hardware.

There are now multiple levels of integration between the 3Com IP Telephony software and IBM's Lotus Notes, Domino and Sametime 7.5. By creating an integrated inbox, users "can receive voice mail and faxes in the same inbox as e-mail. They can play the wave file and forward it to other users as appropriate," said Michael Rousseaux, offering manager for collaborative technologies at IBM, in Cambridge, Mass.

From within the Notes client, users can also highlight a name and click to call.

IBM also added integration with Domino's LDAP directory, allowing synchronization of what had been separate directories. It allows users to

add, change or delete resources in one place, instead of having to maintain two separate directories. IBM said it intends to add integration with other directories, such as Microsoft's Active Directory, later in 2007.

The integration of IBM's Epic Center call center application with the 3Com IP Telephony software adds inbound call center functions such as intelligent call routing and queue management to the system. The software uses business logic to route calls to the most appropriate call center agent, depending on skills, and it populates that agent's screen with data on the customer such as previous contacts or business history.

The 3Com SDK for System i IP Telephony provides new APIs to allow systems integrators, ISVs and customers to more easily integrate IP telephony into their business applications.

It is a Web-services-based interface that provides access to functions such as initiating a phone call, transferring a call and initiating a conference call "from within a business application," Rousseaux said.

Early users at Roland, which is now installing the System i IP Telephony offering, believe the system will allow them to cut their maintenance costs in half and find better ways to serve their customers, according to David Williams, IT director for Roland, in Los Angeles.

By eliminating maintenance on separate phone systems, Roland will spend 50 percent less on maintenance and make its sales reps more accessible. "We want to change the way we do business in ways that make it better for our customers and consumers," Williams said. "People shouldn't have to hunt down sales reps." And the system may let Roland allow some customer service reps to work from home.

"We think it's a win-win for employees, direct customers and consumers

who want to call and talk to a product support person," Williams said.

The System i Integrated Collaboration offering is due in the second quarter. Pricing for Domino and Sametime integration will start at \$500 each. The System i IP Telephony Express Edition, which runs the software, starts at \$37,900.

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