ThinkFree, Zimbra Prep Offline Clients

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ThinkFree and Zimbra announced at the 2007 O'Reilly Emerging Technology Conference offline clients of their popular office software packages.

Zimbra's email client has been online only, working in a web browser with the company's collaborative mail server. Built on open source technology, Zimbra's email client and server is aimed at small businesses and corporations who are looking to reduce costs for maintaining mail services and other collaborative technologies.

ThinkFree currently positions itself as an online alternative to Microsoft Office, offering ThinkFree Write, ThinkFree Calc and ThinkFree Show, which cover the main office application pillars of word processing, spreadsheet and presentation apps. Currently, ThinkFree runs in a web browser.

In addition, ThinkFree enables collaborative groups to work together to edit anc create documents. ThinkFree's Doc Exchange adds a content syndication element as well.

The new ThinkFree offline component builds on the company existing standalone software by enabling the content sharing, linking and collaborative features now available with the online component. This enables a user to work offline – when traveling, for example – but then sync up with the online storage and sharing component. This new offline version will be part of the company's Premium service. Pricing hasn't been firmed up yet, but the current thinking is about $7 per month,

including substantial online storage well beyond the current 1-Gbyte limit for users of the free version of ThinkFree.

Zimbra's offline versions of it email and collaboration software, also written in Java, will still run in a web browser, but simply point to a localhost on your system. The offline version will then appear identical to the online app. The new application, dubbed Zimbra Desktop, will only support Zimbra's open servers at first release, but future versions will add support for POP and Microsoft Exchange.

ThinkFree will be shipping its offline application in late April, while Zimbra is targeting a summer release for its Zimbra Desktop.

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