Google Slyly Pushing Google Apps Into Businesses

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Google Apps basically provides online business functionality to customers without the IT resources of a large-scale company. Clients can get e-mail addresses with their own domain names and share documents and spreadsheets with colleagues online, among other services. Though it's marketed as a cost-effective option for small businesses, Google Apps has been widely regarded as a possible threat to Microsoft Office.

"When we built these products, we didn't think that we were building for a particular segment," said Rishi Chandra, a spokesman for Google Apps. "Customer pain points cut across - company size - , so from our perspective, this application will apply to any part of a company."

Those pain points included limited IT resources, the complexity of setting up a technology infrastructure and collaboration difficulties when employees, suppliers or consulting are based in varying locations, Chandra said.

"We are offering a fully hosted solution," Chandra said. "There is no hardware or software to install. You just get it. You can focus on your core business and we will take care of IT issues for you."

This would usually be a plus for small operations, but Chandra said companies like General Electric and salesforce.com are exploring pilots with Google Apps.

"Large companies have an existing architecture, so we provided APIs," Chandra said. "They can also integrate with their existing sign-on. It's all about integration."

A recent examination of Google Apps by Forrester Research, however, said that some larger companies might be wary of Google Apps because the content stored on Google's systems is not encrypted.

Rajen Sheth, Google's product manger for enterprise said that characterization is misleading."We put the security around - the data - ," he said. "We provide a variety of security mechanisms to prevent penetration into the data center - with - strong perimeter security. From internally, we have tight controls to make sure that only authorized users or authorized administrators who need access to the data"

"We trust the system," Sheth said, pointing to the fact that Google hosts all of its data and intellectual property on the system, not just that of Google Apps.

Google App customers were buzzing this week after receiving a notice from Google that its Calendar program would be down for maintenance for a 12-hour period during the day on Thursday. Many questioned why Google did not do the updates overnight or during the weekend, prompting Google to put the maintenance on hold.

"We definitely heard the feedback on that and responded quickly," Chandra said. "We're going to be delaying the maintenance upgrade to minimize impact."

When Google does go forward with the maintenance, however, users will only be affected for five to 10 minutes at a time and not the entire 12 hours, Chandra said.

Google purchased wiki service JotSpot in October 2006, which could bring new functionality to Apps. Chandra said Google has yet to formally announce how JotSpot might be integrated into Google services, but "there are potential areas where we're looking at it," he said.

JotSpot only conceded via its Web site that "Google shares JotSpot's vision for helping people collaborate, share and work together online."

The Apps unit is currently working on presentation software, but Chandra could not provide any futher detail on upcoming additions to the service.

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