

Microsoft Partners Announce New Phones, Devices

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Microsoft will use its Windows Hardware Engineering Conference to announce 15 new phones and devices that work with its unified communications software from nine of its partners.

As Microsoft continues to ratchet up its focus on unified communications, it will use the Windows Hardware Engineering Conference in Los Angeles the week of May 14 to announce 15 new phones and devices from nine of its partners.

This is part of the Redmond, Wash., company's drive to provide customers with devices that connect their workplace phones to e-mail, instant messaging, real-time presence information, conferencing, VOIP (voice over IP) and mobile communications.

The new phones and devices include IP phones, USB phones, wired and wireless headsets, Bluetooth devices, conferencing phones, portable speakerphones, LCD monitors and laptops, Chris Cullen, director of product management for Microsoft's unified communications group, told eWEEK in an interview.

Microsoft has provided the device manufacturers, which include LG-Nortel, NEC, Plantronics, Polycom and Samsung, with design specifications to ensure that they work easily with Microsoft's unified communication software: Office Communications Server 2007 and Office Communicator 2007, Cullen said.

All of the products are nearing the end of Microsoft's qualification cycle and will be available for use in the public beta program of Office Communications Server 2007 and Office Communicator 2007 starting May 14, he said.

"Today's enterprise voice workplace is about vertically integrated solution sets, and our approach to this is to focus on the software, through open standards and published APIs, and using that to enable multiple partners to offer a wide range of phones and devices, resulting in more choice for the end-user at a range of price points," Cullen said.

In addition to the broad range of user choices that will deliver more value for less cost, devices will be tailored to the needs of specific types of workers, he said, noting that a January 2007 Gartner report found that handsets typically cost around 40 to 45 percent of a total telephony installation.

Microsoft is also predicting that, over the next three years, 100 million people will be making calls from within the Office suite of products, which would be some 20 percent of the total current Office user base and larger than the IP phone market that exists today, he said.

"We also expect that VOIP deployments will rise by 50 percent in the enterprise over the next three years, while the average VoIP solution for business will cost half what it does today, as VoIP systems move from hardware to software over the next three years," Cullen said.

While there were always market leaders who adopted new technologies early, Microsoft did not see any particular market segment adopting these technologies any quicker than the others, he said.

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