

RIM Announces PBX Integration, Wi-Fi

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The company's BlackBerry Mobile Voice System integrates BlackBerry devices with corporate PBXes; RIM is also focusing on areas like Wi-Fi, navigation and entertainment.

Research In Motion, maker of BlackBerry devices, has begun the process of integrating its devices with corporate PBXes, with the BlackBerry Mobile Voice System. The new integration capabilities mean that corporate BlackBerry users will be able to dial extensions directly, transfer calls within the company and perform other PBX functions in much the same manner as if they were using desktop PBX telephones. The announcement took place at the RIM Wireless Enterprise Symposium held here the week of May 7.

The BlackBerry Mobile Voice System includes the BlackBerry MVS Client, which runs on the BlackBerry device, and BlackBerry MVS

Connectors, which work with the BlackBerry Enterprise Server to provide communications between the server and a company's PBX. In addition, the Ascendent Voice Mobility Suite integrates the PBX functions with the BlackBerry server. RIM bought Ascendent Systems in 2006.

Notably, the Ascendent product also supports non-BlackBerry wireless phones, a capability that RIM plans to keep. "The basic proposition of the Ascendent solution is that for every user you can register three or four phone numbers. It can be a home phone, a cell phone or whatever. When you call the number they all ring," said David Heit, Director of Software Product Management for Enterprise Solutions for RIM, based in Waterloo, Ontario.

Heit noted that while work has begun on making sure that all PBX equipment would be supported by the MVS solution, there is still a long way to go. "In the PBX world there are at least 10 major vendors," Heit said. "The vast bulk of the market are using TDM - time-division multiplexing - PBXes. They're talking about moving to IP. Some are moving directly to IP and SIP [Session Initiation Protocol]-based PBXes, but most are somewhere in between. We're trying to come up with a connection strategy to handle all of them."

Heit said that while different kinds of phones would be supported by the new BlackBerry MVS, BlackBerry devices and devices running BlackBerry Connect would get more features. "In a BlackBerry Connect device, we've just recently announced - that - the mobility application suite is providing more of the standard BlackBerry application suite in addition to the Windows 6 experience," Heit said. "It'll be a virtual BlackBerry."

Heit said this new capability is leading to some interesting innovations, including one being shown by IBM that lets users convert from an instant

messaging session to a voice session with a single click.

RIM Senior Vice President David Yach also told eWEEK that RIM is working to add Wi-Fi capability to its handsets, and plans to deliver the first of them later in 2007. He noted that some of RIM's competitors, including Palm and HTC, already include Wi-Fi capability with some of their devices, but said the seamless handoff that customers want between the corporate network and the cellular network requires the cooperation of the carriers involved. "We're working with the carriers to support that kind of technology," Yach said.

"I think Wi-Fi is interesting because it offers a number of capabilities, and because it offers coverage where there is none," Yach said. "You're not as concerned about usage fees. Our goal with Wi-Fi then is that Wi-Fi will just work. When you have coverage Wi-Fi will work, and when you don't you'll use something else," he said.

Yach said a number of other applications are emerging at RIM's conference this week. "The ones that I like the best are some of the navigation applications," Yach said. "TeleNav is a partner of ours and suddenly I need only one device, and I don't get lost any more. And as a male, I no longer need to ask directions."

In fact, navigation products for the BlackBerry were by far the largest single segment of the range of products being shown at RIM's symposium. Navigation for the BlackBerry can include turn-by-turn directions, either for a car or on foot, and frequently can include other location-based services as well.

In addition, Yach said newer BlackBerry devices will support entertainment features such as music, games and video. "You're going to see more entertainment applications from everybody," he said.

"Everybody who is a business user is also a consumer. At the hotel room

at night they just want something mindless to do like play a game or listen to music." He noted that the new BlackBerry Curve includes Roxio's media suite as a standard application.

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