

Microsoft to pull Facebook, MySpace into Outlook

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In this screen shot provided by Microsoft, the Microsoft Outlook Social Connector page is shown. (AP Photo/Microsoft Corp.)

(AP) -- Microsoft Corp. is taking another step toward turning Outlook, its desktop e-mail program, into a hub for information from popular social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace.

Microsoft's "beta" test version of the Outlook Social Connector, an add-on for Outlook, was first discussed last November. When a user clicks to read an e-mail message, a new pane on the main e-mail reading screen fills with the sender's most recent social-networking activities. That could be that sender's new Facebook status update or a newly added professional contact on the business networking site LinkedIn.

On Wednesday, Microsoft updated the Social Connector software, and

LinkedIn released the first outside plug-in for the feature.

Microsoft has a mixed record when it comes to Web trends. The company's free Hotmail and Windows Live Messenger programs are widely used, but its Windows Live blog and social network didn't pick up much steam in the face of competition from Facebook. In this case, a small startup called Xobni has already built an Outlook add-on that combines inbox search with content from Facebook, LinkedIn and others.

Microsoft's software also treats Outlook itself as a social network. If the e-mail sender and recipient are jointly working on a document stored on a company's Sharepoint server, both will see updates if one logs on to make edits.

For now, the software doesn't let people use Outlook to push information back up to LinkedIn, Facebook or other sites.

People using Office 2003, 2007 and beta versions of Office 2010 can download the updated Outlook Social Connector beta from Microsoft and then visit LinkedIn for the add-on software.

Microsoft said the Facebook and MySpace plug-ins will be ready for download by the time Office 2010 goes on sale in June.

Will Kennedy, a corporate vice president for the Office group, said some of Microsoft's business customers have expressed concern that employees will become less productive if they have all this extra information at their fingertips.

But Kennedy sees business-friendly uses for the Social Connector. He thinks it could speed up processes that require approval from a string of people, because each person in that chain could see when it's time for

him or her to weigh in.

"We don't want this to sort of be the next great time waster in the workplace," he said.

More information:

Outlook Social Connector: <http://bit.ly/creaaU>

LinkedIn software: <http://www.linkedin.com/outlook>

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