

Skype to unveil group video chat function

May 5 2010, By RACHEL METZ , AP Technology Writer



(AP) -- Internet calling service Skype plans a public "beta" test of a group video chat function that lets up to five people participate in a video call simultaneously.

When the feature launches next week it will be free, but Skype Ltd. plans to start charging for it along with some other upcoming features in three or four months, said Neil Stevens, general manager of Skype's consumer business segment.

Skype's software already offers a range of free services, including the ability to make voice or video calls and send [instant messages](#) to other Skype users. Users pay for services such as making calls from a PC to a landline or cell phone.

Stevens said group [video chat](#) will first be available to those who use Skype on Windows PCs, and the company expects to roll out a Mac version later this year.

Stevens said the feature is the one users have requested most.

Skype, which was sold late last year by [eBay](#) Inc. for about \$2 billion to an investor group that includes Skype's founders, is also expanding its monthly subscription offerings to include calls to both cell phones and landlines in more than 170 countries.

The company's existing subscription plans include one that allows calls to more than 40 countries, but they focus mostly on calls to landlines. That is generally cheaper for the company than routing calls from the Internet to cell phones.

On Wednesday, [Skype](#) plans to unveil new subscriptions that let users choose which countries they want to call and whether they want to call landlines and cell phones or just one of the two.

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