

### Plugging-in to IBM's revamped IM client

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By Kathleen Richards

IBM's Lotus Software division has dusted off its enterprise instant messaging client and re-architected it using the Eclipse open-source platform. In the final stages of a managed beta process, IBM plans to launch a "semi-public" Web site offering client information, downloads, and resources to developers who want to create Eclipse plug-ins, apps and audio/video extensions for the overhauled Lotus SameTime 7.5 client. The upgraded version, which will run on multiple platforms (Windows, Macintosh, Linux) is expected to ship in the third quarter.

"It can be server deployed so that we can update elements of the code without having to redeploy clients, but most importantly it has a plug-in model that lets anyone—ourselves, partners, and customers—extend the capabilities of the IM client," says David Marshak, senior product manager for Real Time Collaboration products at IBM's Lotus Software division.

With this release, IBM focused on increased flexibility, offering federation with public IM networks (AOL, Google, Yahoo), and integration with telephony and video technology provided by a host of suppliers. A mobile client, planned for release in the fourth quarter, is expected to support RIM Blackberry, Nokia and Windows Mobile devices. Next year, SameTime 7.5 will integrate with Microsoft Outlook, Office XP and SharePoint, according to IBM.

Eclipse, independent from IBM since 2003, is a Java-based extensible development framework that features a plug-in architecture. It offers a plug-in development environment (PDE) that developers can use to create custom plug-ins to extend the capabilities of SameTime 7.5.

In addition to the existing SameTime client toolkits (C++, Java), IBM is adding another Java toolkit that allows developers to take their Eclipse plug-ins and access the other services that exist within SameTime, such as location-based awareness. The toolkit is in its third beta. More than 100 developers are participating in the managed beta program. Another toolkit is ST Links, which allows developers to link "presence" on any page to other apps such as ERP or CRM.

A sample plug-in that ships with SameTime 7.5 is the ability to find a restaurant based on the user's location. Within IBM, a SameTime plug-in allows users to go to any IBM

building in the world, and with a single click, find all the nearby printers. This app already existed, but it required users to go through about nine clicks, and know their exact location, explains Marshak.

“Presence is just another plug-in,” he says, “and plug-ins can talk to plug-ins.” Many plug-ins will use availability presence and location presence. Several companies are building softphones for voice over IP. Some developers are working on alerting apps to immediately notify users of important changes regarding a customer or business process. Other apps will take advantage of Web services.

“Most plug-ins that you write into the Eclipse framework will run seamlessly on all three platforms,” says Marshak. “Exceptions are plug-ins that require operating system interactions, so for example, a plug-in that uses the microphone and the speaker of your PC, then you need to write one that knows how to interact.”

SameTime plug-ins should also work with the next version of Lotus Notes (Hanover) expected in 2007, which is built on the same Eclipse framework. Like SameTime 7.5, the client version of Notes will run on multiple platforms including Linux. The Notes compatibility broadens the market for third-party plug-ins beyond the 16 million SameTime installed base, notes Marshak.

Rolling out a custom plug-in to an enterprise is no small feat, however. It will require enterprise app developers to create their own update sites from which Eclipse-based clients can receive updates.

For now, IBM's developerWorks Web site offers a walk-through of the development of a custom plug-in that extends the SameTime 7.5 client to support a partner information lookup in a LDAP directory. Developers can test their custom plug-ins using IBM's public Lotus SameTime server, [messaging.ngi.ibm.com](mailto:messaging.ngi.ibm.com).

IBM will also introduce a plug-in catalog that developers can use to put up links to share their SameTime 7.5 plug-ins, or to sell what they've created, says Marshak.

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