

Raketu VoIP goes online, readies hosted SMB service

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Raketu Communications is about to launch a web-based version of its VoIP desktop application that it claims is more secure and robust service for business users. And, later this year, it will create a more dedicated SMB hosted offering, chief executive Greg Parker told Computer Business Review.

Called RakWeb, the online service will offer the same features as the earlier LaunchPad desktop app, which includes VoIP, IM, file sharing, global SMS, video on demand and IPTV. Businesses, which make up as many as 15% of Raketu users, can customize the service so that some features aren't available to their workers.

Raketu's VoIP is like a combination of Skype, in that it enables low-cost dial-out and incoming calls from and to any phone, as well as free PC-to-PC calling; and Jajah, which requires no broadband connection, software or headsets. Users type in their own number, from either a landline or mobile phone, into Jajah's/Raketu's web site and the number they want to call. Jajah/Raketu then calls both parties on their phones.

And the forthcoming Web-based version of Raketu's service would enable workers to access their contacts and make low-cost VoIP calls from any computer, and using either a dial-up or broadband connection.

Since its Launchpad desktop and Windows or Symbian mobile service began last October, it has been downloaded 1.5 million times and has attracted SMBs in Europe, Asia and the US, according to the Parker.

Raketu is different from Skype and other low-cost providers in a couple of ways. Notably, Raketu uses a peer-to-peer architecture that does not use super nodes, which can open a network up to security issues. A super node is a network proxy that handles data flows and connections for other users. A Skype user may unknowingly become a super node, which Parker said could create performance issues on their computer. For businesses, it could create security concerns.

"There's the potential for denial-of-service attacks and viruses," he said. "We're starting to see some of that to some degree with Skype...with hackers getting into their super nodes."

Each individual peer in Raketu is responsible from a peer-to-peer level, he said

Also, Raketu promises more robust quality-of-service for its VoIP. Unlike Skype, it does not use grey routes, which is one of three categories of Internet routes - one that has been received by a route server but is not configured to be proxied. Essentially, grey routes give a VoIP call less bandwidth than one of the higher-quality routes. The upshot is more jitter, less call completion and more busy signals, whereas a quality route promises a much higher rate of call completion, Parker said. And Raketu's service runs on high-quality routes, he said.

What's more, Raketu is less expensive than Skype and others, Parker said. "In a lot of cases we're half the price of Skype, particularly for overseas calling and even in the US," he said.

This is partly because the company negotiated "some very good contracts" with the operators in the 43 countries it operates in, he said. "But secondly, and more importantly, because we make much less use of the whole server infrastructure and we don't use a super-noding architecture, we have the lowest infrastructure cost among our peers." According to a Raketu study, the company pays more than 90% less to support a single user than Yahoo, for example.

Parker said Raketu would likely be profitable by next month.

New York, NY-based Raketu has about 20 employees, and has raised an undisclosed amount of venture capital since it launched late last year. Parker said it would raise its second round of venture capital financing during the next few months or so.

He said he is running the company to make it profitable and public. "But if a large company comes along that we think strategically makes sense and the price is right, we probably would be willing to be absorbed into that company," he said. Already, Raketu is getting enquiries from very large telecom operators in the US, Europe and Asia. Parker declined to give any details. He said some large VCs also had recently been in touch.