

Symantec Raises the Profile of IM

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The recent announcement from Symantec Corp. of its intention to acquire IMlogic Inc., a leading player in the real-time, secure Instant Messaging (IM) threat protection and management arena, provides the first real indication that mainstream security vendors are starting to take the IM threat model seriously. IM communications have the potential to deliver viruses, worms, Trojans, and spyware, malicious and unwanted content, and cause identity intrusion issues. In fact, pretty much any of the unwelcome security threats that are presented by the enterprise use of e-mail communications also reappear in real-time through the establishment and usage of IM delivery protocols. Furthermore, IM services also share many of the same regulatory compliance issues; these include the need to monitor for legal and regulatory requirements and common archiving and privacy issues. To date some mainstream security organisations have claimed to have the ability to deal with real-time IM communications, but few have strategies that have evolved beyond a stop-and-block capability.

IM and Peer-to-Peer (P2P) usage started out in the home and home/office environment, but for at least a year now it has been clear that this real-time voice and data communications approach is having a significant impact within the business environment, its usage is growing rapidly, and has outstripped the protection industry's ability to deal with it. To date IM protection and management has been left to specialists such as IMlogic, Akonix, and FaceTime to deal with.

Many current IM problems exist because of the informal way in which IM usage first arrived into the business arena; with staff making use of IM technology before seeking formal management approval. Furthermore, it remains the case that many organisations still unofficially allow IM communications to take place without giving enough thought to putting protection and management systems in place to deal with the potential security fallout.

IM Manager from IMlogic provides IM policy enforcement, centralised security controls, and enhanced real-time communications for extending IM usage across organisations regardless of their IM client of choice. Its role involves managing, securing, and archiving IM traffic with certified support for public and enterprise IM networks, including AOL, MSN, Yahoo!, ICQ, IBM Lotus Instant Messaging, Microsoft Office Live Communications Server, Jabber, and others. The point is that as far as IM and P2P usage in the business environment is concerned, stop-and-block is no longer an option. Business organisations need to realise that mainstream IM usage has already arrived; it has a role in business communities as far ranging as equity traders and shipping companies, and almost every other area of business that you could name.

Going forward the requirement will be to provide secure management solutions that deal with IM on a business level. They need to start with an understanding of existing usage, address the issues of future access and usage policy, deal with the blocking of unauthorised usage, and then manage IM services in a way that meets corporate information protection policies and deals with regulatory compliance issues. Symantec has taken the first step down this road by recognising that the acquisition of IMlogic fills a hole in its existing systems protection portfolio, and as a result now has a clear opportunity to drive the real-time IM protection and communications market forward.