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Raketu to add mobility to Web-based VoIP
New version of the Raketu application will let users make VoIP calls, send text messages, and chat from cell phone

By John Blau, IDG News Service
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Raketu Communications will add two new mobile phone features to its integrated communications, entertainment, and social networking service in a move to attract consumers on the go.

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Next week, Raketu will introduce a new domain, www.raketu.mobi, which will allow mobile phone users to more easily navigate the Raketu site and use services such as the company's RakWeb service launched earlier this week, said CEO Greg Parker in an interview.

By the end of the month, the company intends to launch a new mobile phone version of the Raketu application, which users can install on their phones to make VoIP calls, send text messages, chat, and more, Parker said.

Raketu, which is based in New York, is trying to carve out a niche in the highly competitive market for Web-based services by offering an integrated communications, online entertainment, and social networking service that can be used on both desktop PCs and mobile phones.

"We have a tightly integrated package of services that we believe is unique and attractive to consumers," Parker said. Many rival Internet companies tend to focus on one service, such as VoIP or online entertainment, but not on three as Raketu does, he added.

The company offers a peer-to-peer VoIP service similar to Skype's, a unit of eBay. Users who have dial-up or broadband connections and have installed the Raketu application can make free VoIP calls to each other as well as to landline and mobile users in 42 countries, paying a low fee for calls outside these areas.

The Raketu application also allows users to view streamed IPTV (Internet Protocol television) and VOD (video on demand) channels, as well as news and information feeds. Text messaging, IM, and podcasts are among several additional features.

The "fully integrated" service, Parker said, allows to view an IPTV or VOD stream and chat via IM or VoIP at the same time.

Fringland (Fring) and Jajah, which already offer mobile phone VoIP service, provide no online entertainment or social networking services.

The new RakWeb application can be used without installing software on a computer. Users have access to Raketu

services such as VoIP, e-mail, IM, and IPTV, and can make call-back calls, linking, for instance, two mobile phones.

Raketu calls between two mobile phones in Germany, for instance, cost around $0.30 per minute for the person who initiates the call. Raketu calls between a phone in Germany and one in the U.S. cost $0.15 per minute. If outside their home market, however, users have to pay a roaming fee to initiate or receive a call.

For comparison, the German subsidiary of Vodafone Group charges €0.75 ($1.00) to both initiate and receive a roaming call, with each minute billed according to the customer's tariff package. The minute fee, depending on the package, can range from €0.06 to around €0.30 for contract customers and €0.59 for prepaid customers.

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