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Raketu Joins the SMB Video Conferencing Race

Free video conferencing service for up to five participants works through client software or browsers.

by **Robert Poe** | **April 8, 2009**

If you have five people on a conference call, it's business — even if all of them are just friends. If it were just light chit-chat, there wouldn't be five of you. Obviously there's something important going on, and even more so if video is involved. Thus **Raketu Communications Inc**.'s new Internet **video conferencing** application would be a business tool even if its only users were the socially oriented individuals that the New York-based startup typically appeals to. But in fact, real companies are turning out to be major users of the new offering.

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Registered Raketu users can access the application, which provides video calls for up to five participants through webcam-equipped, Internet-connected PCs, in two ways. If they have Windows computers, users can download the Raketu client software. Version 3.5, just released, is the first with video conferencing capability. Otherwise registered Raketu clients can use the Flash-based Web browser version. After logging into the Raketu Web site, they just need to click the video conferencing link to get started. Both versions offer the same functionality, according to CEO Greg Parker. And because the versions both connect over the Internet, they cost nothing.

While in conference, users can resize the screens of the participants (including their own) as they choose. Options range from 120x160 pixels to 480x640 pixels, with 240x320 the default. Outgoing video streams deliver 30 FPS (frames per second), which is TV quality. Incoming streams vary dynamically from 30 FPS on down, depending on connection speed and quality. The service works fine over standard DSL or cable links, Parker said. Users can also share documents such as PowerPoint slides and photos.

Small businesses are using the service for the obvious reasons, according to Parker. For one, it saves them money on travel. For another, it helps employees communicate better than they could by phone, picking up visual cues that they would otherwise miss. Trial users claim the addition of video makes conversations "more real," he explained.

Companies can also use the service to impress customers by setting up video rather than simple audio conference calls. All it takes is emailing customers a link to click that automatically logs them into the conference. They needn't sign up with Raketu or do anything else.

The service is the latest step in Raketu's plan to provide all forms of communication to all people. The company offers everything from IM (instant messaging), texting, profiles and blogs to information and streaming entertainment services. Its user interface interoperates with all major chat services, making it unnecessary to keep multiple IM clients open. All of this is in addition to its core Skype-style cheap inbound and outbound VoIP calling.

While a lot of its services are clearly aimed at consumers, and young ones at that, Raketu offers plenty of business benefits. A click-to-call-me widget is one obvious example. Perhaps most important is that corporate users can have a single source of all communication records, including calls, IMs, texts, etc. And now they can log their video conferences as well.

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