

# The Case for Instant Messaging Appliances

## 1. Introduction

The explosive increase in Internet usage over the last few years due to the advent and subsequent widespread availability of the World Wide Web has significantly changed the way we communicate. Given the general populace's familiarity with this new medium, email is now well understood and has become the de facto standard in communicating over the Internet and for easily sharing complex information. A new communication phenomenon, however, is taking hold in the form of instant messaging (IM), that extends our ability to communicate online in real-time. IM's nascent origins have quickly exploded into mainstream acceptance much the same way as email had done years earlier. Though first viewed strictly as a means of chatting with online "buddies" among teens, serious consideration is now being given to IM as a necessary business tool that increases employee productivity in a rapidly changing business environment.

## 2. Market Overview

Today, IT managers and service professionals are seeking new ways to increase worker productivity, improve efficiency, and reduce costs through the use of collaborative tools. Corporate pressures to reduce travel costs and the need to reduce business process cycle times are forcing IT managers to be more creative about the real-time collaboration tools they provide as meeting substitutes. Instant messaging is considered part of a larger base of "collaborative" applications that are used to enhance communications and the sharing of information.

### ***2.1 Benefits of IM***

Indeed the value provided by instant messaging (IM) is no longer in question. IM is here to stay, and like email, it will evolve into a necessary "mission critical" application. IM is extremely beneficial within corporations because it carries the immediacy of a phone call (without its disruptive nature), and it eliminates long e-mail threads. Also, the presence information (knowing who is online/offline and their status) associated with IM is invaluable in quickly determining who is available for correspondence. With IM, corporations also have the capability to tie together geographically distributed workgroups, improve communication with business partners and suppliers, improve customer support and relations, and facilitate communications within the corporation. IM allows organizations to focus on

“contextual collaboration” strategies with their constituents by allowing employees, customers, and partners to share all types of information within such a collaborative environment.

## ***2.2 Avoiding Public IM Networks***

Sharing of essential information and collaboration are vital to organizational efficiency, and just as corporations would never consider using public free email services (Hotmail<sup>®</sup>, Yahoo<sup>®</sup>, etc.) as a means of secure corporate communication, they should not consider using public instant messaging networks. The challenge, however, that remains for IT departments is how to prevent users from uncontrolled use of public IM networks, and how to successfully convert these users to enterprise-sponsored and managed infrastructures.

At the present, the range of products and services offered by various providers varies greatly across the board but there is definitely a clear need for a cost-effective and easily deployable IM solution for organizations of all sizes. The RapidIM line of appliances delivers on this promise.

## ***2.3 Future of IM***

Growth of corporate IM presents significant opportunities for providers of software and solutions. Companies that develop IM applications will need to continue proving their value by providing upgrades, introducing new product features, and maintaining compatibility with existing enterprise systems. Over time, IM will be embedded in applications, and it will function as a far richer collaboration platform.

Despite e-mail’s current dominance as the communications and collaborative paradigm for the Internet, the growth in corporate IM adoption will serve to complement email usage over time. This adoption is expected to occur at a pace that closely emulates that of corporate email, particularly as firms begin to see the benefits offered by this new technology.

## ***2.4 IM Servers as Ubiquitous as Email Servers***

Eventually, instant messaging servers will be as ubiquitous as email servers are today. Corporations will eventually avoid the public IM networks altogether, or make public IM available to a select few who need to access consumers directly, such as employees within the technical support department. Almost all major corporations today have their own email servers in house or managed by a third party. IM servers will eventually follow the same migration path. Corporations will realize that having their own IM servers is vital to secure corporate communication.

### 3. Use of RapidIM Appliances in Corporations

The RapidIM line of appliances can be used by businesses of all sizes to accelerate and improve corporate communications. Law firms, brokerages, governmental agencies can use corporate IM for:

- Internal B2E (internal management-to-employee relationship) tasks
- Submitting trouble tickets to help desks
- Responding to human resources inquiries
- Providing customer service, and getting the latest product information to services employees.
- Computer-generated informational alerts
- General file sharing
- Voice communication

Today, businesses are seeking cost-effective and simple-to-install-configure-and-maintain solutions to suite their IM needs. As a result, they are evaluating the deployment requirements of the RapidIM line of affordable Instant Messaging appliances. The following are a few deployment examples.

#### 3.1 RapidIM Deployment Example

A typical small business deployment of the RapidIM appliance is shown in Figure 1. Through a web-based administration interface, IT managers can configure the RapidIM appliance and, among other options, grant/deny employee access to public Instant Messaging networks (AOL, MSN, YAHOO, ICQ). The included RapidIM client works seamlessly with the RapidIM appliance and can be easily deployed to the Employee/Client computers. Currently, the RapidIM client will run on all Windows based computers and a Java version will be released shortly.

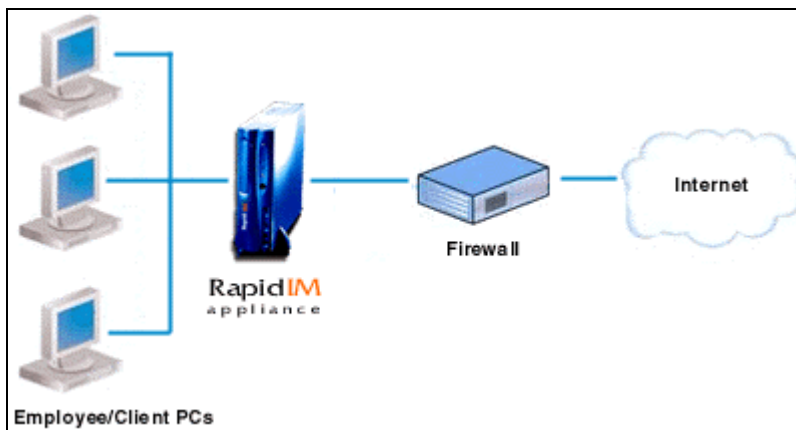


Figure 1. Basic RapidIM appliance deployment.

Figure 2 shows a network diagram for a larger organization that requires a distributed Instant Messaging network and more refined control over their users. As shown in Figure 2, each department (IT, HR, Engineering) has their own RapidIM appliance. This method has two distinct advantages: appliance and network redundancy and user control.

By installing a RapidIM appliance for each department, appliance and network redundancy is achieved because a single failure will not hamper corporate-wide Instant Messaging. For example, in an unforeseen event when the IT department loses its Internet connection, employees within the IT department will still be able to send instant messages to one another. Also, in a rare event when the Instant Messaging appliance fails to function, either from a power outage or malfunction, other departments within the organization can still communicate via IM. Had there been a central IM server connection for all employees, a power failure, network outage or hardware failure would certainly have crippled the organization's ability to communicate, which could lead to significant financial loss.

The second advantage of the network architecture presented in Figure 2 is that a finer method of user control can be exercised by the organization. For example, the IT department may have access to the public IM networks in order to trouble-shoot customer problems. However, the HR department may be restricted from such access and this would be reflected in the configuration of the user policies of the respective appliance.

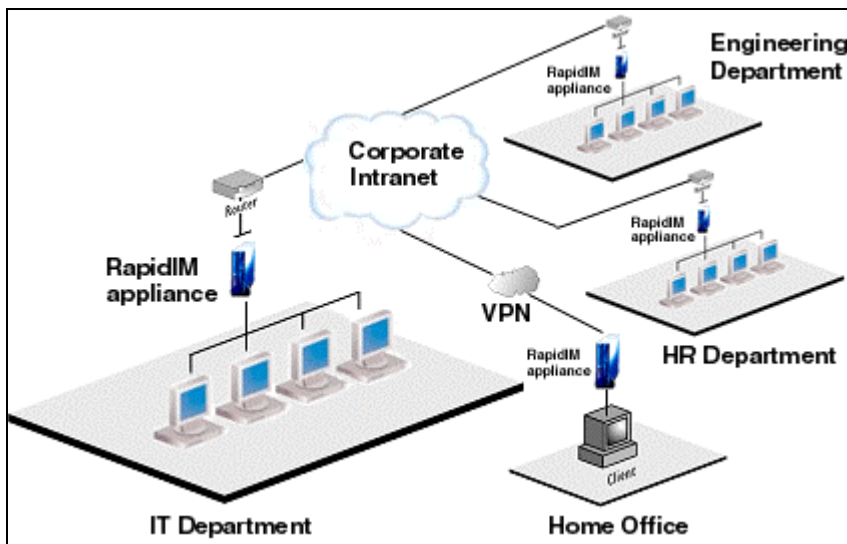


Figure 2. Deployment of RapidIM appliances within an organization.

### **3.2 Portals/Web Sites and ISPs**

The RapidIM appliances can be deployed by online web portals and affinity websites that wish to build a community by providing a branded Instant Messaging client for their users. Because of the cost-effectiveness of the RapidIM line of appliances, even small affinity portals can realize significant value from offering a private IM network, while maintaining strict user controls that can be changed at will by the portal or website. With RapidIM, consumer portals and sites also have the choice of offering integration with the major public IM Networks (AIM, MSN, Yahoo, and ICQ), thus avoiding switching costs to their customers.

With the RapidIM appliance, ISPs can now offer their customers a value added service above and beyond the connection. And with RapidIM's client interface, ISPs have the choice of a private label IM client or an all-in-one desktop portal.

## **4. Summary**

Instant Messaging is poised for explosive and violent growth in the next several years. Corporate users are beginning to realize the full benefits of IM and are making more use of Instant Messages in their daily routing. IT managers are concerned that the proliferation of public IM clients within the organization could open the corporate network to hackers and almost all agree that they would like to keep private instant messages between co-workers out of the public networks. The RapidIM line of appliances empower an organization to realize the full benefits of Instant Messaging while maintaining a system of strict control on both the usage and deployment of IM infrastructure.