



Click-and-connect technology can 'enhance' e-commerce

By Nestor Arellano

A Dallas-based company says it has extended the click to call concept to offer businesses a range of client service-oriented capabilities.

Click to call technology offers online visitors (including customers or potential customers) to a company's Web site a chance to speak directly with a customer service representative through their PC, or by entering their phone number for an immediate call back.

Variations of this Web-based call back service are currently being offered by companies such as eStara Solutions Inc., ClickToCall.com and Jaduka.

Jaduka, a subsidiary of Network IP Inc., a Dallas headquartered telecommunications service provider, says it uses the click-to-connect model as a foundation for a range of services.

For instance, Jaduka says it offers MyPrivateLine, a portable toll-free number that allows call forwarding on the fly to any number a user chooses. This enables users to keep their phone numbers confidential. Another service called ClassAdd offers classified advertisers a "secure", temporary phone number to use in their ads to publicly invite calls without ever having to publish their personal phone numbers.

All calls to that temporary number are forwarded to the advertiser's home, mobile, or work numbers.

After he or she has completed the sale, the advertiser "turns off" the Jaduka ClassAdd number, and no longer receives any more ad related calls.

Jaduka says it is able to route calls originating from the Web directly to the public switched telephone network (PSTN), and connect with more than 120 telecom companies or cellular networks in the world. This capability differentiates it from other click-to-connect service providers, according to company president Jack Rynes. It's particularly useful to businesses that use the Web as a sales and client service channel. These firms can install a "sales agent" or "customer service" button on their Web site that customers can click on to trigger a call to the business.

Most businesses include contact phone numbers on their Web site, but customers can't click on those to trigger instant communication, notes Pete Pattullo, CEO of Longview, Texas-based NetworkIP, an "access exchange" serving voice and data product distributors.

"Customers see the phone number but when they click on it nothing happens. They still have to pick up the phone and dial that number."

Other companies such as eBay may use click-to-call, but employ a closed-system such as Skype, he said. "As a Web service, Jaduka acts as an interface that connects users to the global telephone network regardless of the location of the telecom service provider," said Trevor Baca, the company's vice-president of software engineering.



He said since Jaduka is operating system-independent, the product doesn't influence existing client applications. The system also does not require any client-side installation.

Rynes said their Web-based offering allows significant savings over similar technologies that require hardware installation and lengthy commitment contracts. However, he said the greatest benefit a company can realize is in "saved transactions."

"Most often, clients of Web-based firms lose interest in a transaction because at the final moment of sale they have difficulty contacting a company representative over the phone," Rynes said. Jaduka claims that the "improved" communication capabilities they offer can reduce shopping cart abandonment by as much as 45 percent. Poor customer service and client interface is often the reason behind ditched virtual shopping carts, according to Tim Richardson, professor of e-commerce at Seneca College in Toronto.

"Most often e-shoppers want to be able to speak to a person on the other end before closing a deal. If that could be done easily over the phone it's even better."

Richardson sees Jaduka's offering as "promising" for e-commerce and possibly inventory management as well. "If this system can be hooked up to a radio frequency ID (RFID) system that will automatically contact administrators about a shipment's arrival at a certain depot, that will be a great opportunity.

Recently, Jaduka made its application programming interface open to the public, so programmers can develop applications more suited for their businesses.

Rynes said users have also requested that the company include voice mail and conferencing features to Jaduka.

He said these features will be rolled out later this fall.