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Channel embraces social computing

Resellers are realigning their resources as landgrab for high-growth market begins

Doug Woodburn, CRN 09 Nov 2009

Social computing is shaping up to be a growth area for the channel, with some VARs predicting it could account for a fifth of their business within a year.

Applications that enable employees to collaborate and share information - such as Microsoft SharePoint and Lotus Connections - are gaining traction as enterprises respond to the consumer boom in social networking.

IBM reseller Portal Partnership has given business development director John Lindley the task of building a Lotus Connections practice over the coming months.

He claimed it is growing faster than any Lotus product in history.

"We are making a big investment in re-aligning sales teams and our relationship with IBM," he said. "It is an easy connection to have with customers.

"People do not want to spend a lot of money, but there is a lot of interest in Web 2.0 and social media."

Portal Partnership has 75 staff and a turnover of £15m, and Lindley predicted social computing would grow from nothing to 20 per cent of its business within 12 months.

"We believe that we are one of the first pushing this because the community has been a bit cautious. We want to be there during the landgrab phase," he said.

Barrie Desmond, business development director at distributor VADition, agreed.

"Things such as Lotus Connections and SharePoint are manifestations of what we are seeing in social networking," he said. "As usual, enterprises have to catch up.

"Resellers that can demonstrate some knowledge and understanding will be like the one-eyed man in the land of the blind."

However, Robin Meehan, chief technology officer at IBM Premier Business Partner Smart421, said: "Social computing is a massive movement, but claims that resellers can make one fifth of next year's turnover just from this sector are hard to swallow.

"There is so much consumer-grade software out there, which is good and available free of charge, and this might stymie any gold rush that resellers think exists."

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