

Sun Deal Could Give IBM Entry to Device OS Market

Maisie Ramsay

If the rumor that [IBM will buy out Sun Microsystems](#) [1] comes true, the company would be able to secure a quick, dominant entry into the crowded device operating system (OS) market.

Though IBM has fared better than some of its competitors, it has still taken a hit from the worldwide economic downturn. Unnamed sources told Reuters that IBM will cut 5,000 jobs in the United States, about 4 percent of its U.S. workforce. A buyout of Sun could shore up the company's position in the high-end computer server industry and give IBM immediate access to the smartphone OS market.

A partnership with Sun also could allow IBM to integrate Java with its own mobile applications, particularly its Lotus Sametime platform, opening up the possibility of a unified communications platform for devices.

"IBM has a spotty track record on the device app side; this could change that, could create very good, productive applications for enterprises and then consumers," says Ashvin Vellody, senior vice president of enabling technologies at the Yankee Group.

"Lotus and Sametime could be rolled out on the mobile base, giving IBM nice entries into the enterprise markets. It gives Microsoft and Symbian, a Nokia-led alliance, strong competition on the OS side. The other competition is for wide enterprise apps, the RIM/Microsoft angle with software applications on devices."

IBM has experienced some difficulties in getting Sametime out to a large population because it doesn't have control over an operating system, and this move could allow IBM to create a more stable commercialized platform for unified mobile communications.

"I'm envisioning that Sametime would evolve... With Java ME, with that type of a product it could incite IBM to productize it, commercialize it and include it in every phone that's Java-enabled," says Ken Burden, practice director for mobile devices at ABI Research. "This could be that foot hold in the mobile device space that IBM has been waiting for. That's one of the more intriguing parts of this, they could actually build an operating system around Java."

A partnership with IBM could help Java-based Real Time Operating Systems in feature phones remain relevant as more phones become based on high-level operating systems like Symbian and Android. A Java-based OS would eliminate the need for an abstraction layer between the RTOS and Java-based applications, ultimately improving application performance and making it attractive to

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developers. Feature phones would grow in importance, outfitted with a unified communications platform.

If IBM were to release a Java-based OS, it wouldn't be the first, but it would be more likely to succeed. SavaJe released such an OS before it went defunct in 2006, a failure attributed to its lack of backing from a big OEM necessary to get the system off its feet. SavaJe's intellectual property rights were acquired by Sun Microsystems in 2007.

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