Innovative way to network online

Financial Times

Paul Taylor

8/18/05

http://news.ft.com/cms/s/dcd7ab64-1013-11da-bd5c-00000e2511c8.html (Password Required)

Sometimes the hardest part of writing about a new technology is describing it.

So it is with imeem (www.imeem.com), a free software tool/web service that was officially launched on Monday.

"Meems" are virtual meeting places or groups within imeem that users can design and others can join. Its creators describe imeem, which uses a secure form of P2P (peer-to-peer) technology, as a "digital lifestyle tool".

Probably the best way to think about imeem is as an extended communications tool that blends the concepts of social networking with instant messaging, blogging (creating an online diary), online file sharing and desktop search into a single package.

At its core, imeem allows its users – or members – to seek out others with similar interests and to build their own private, semi-private or public meems.

An imeem member retains full control over who can search, see and share their digital content, which remains on a user's hard drive rather than being uploaded to a third-party server.

I have been using a test version of the service for the past few weeks and can report that I found it to be as promised: simple, powerful and useful.

To start with, users need to create their own imeen identity, providing as much personal information as they like, including, if desired, a photograph.

You can then set about building your imeen network – typically by sending friends and colleagues an e-mail inviting them to sign up.

Once set up, your contacts appear in a "buddy list" on the left side of the screen along with their photo if available and status – whether or not they are online. You can also click next to your friends and see their "buddy lists", look at information they have posted about themselves and ask permission to link to them.

Because imeem establishes a direct peer-to-peer connection between users, members can chat without the fear that someone else might be listening in. That could be particularly useful for a team of collaborators or a small business.

Users can also set up or join meems that are broader than your buddy list and are really chat groups built around specific interests or themes.

As a tool for creating a blog, imeem is much easier to use than many dedicated blogging packages and it lets users post to their own blog or comment on others.

Imeem claims its security rivals any private corporate network, opening up the possibility that business teams and other corporate users could use the software to create secure collaborative networks.
Whether you want to share photos securely, create a private online community, start a blog or use its instant messaging capabilities, imeem removes the need to use multiple pieces of software.