



## Buying IBM xSeries

# Startup Provides Consumers With Private Networking

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Startup Imeem Inc. on Monday launched its desktop software that lets people build their own private social networks with friends and family, so they can share files, such as photos and music; and communicate through blogs, instant messaging and chat rooms.

The Imeem software is available without charge, but the company hopes to make money by selling advertising that would be displayed to subscribers based on their use of the company's software. No information on the user would leave the desktop, officials with the Palo Alto, Calif., company said.

The fact that personal information won't be shared with anyone, unless a person chooses to share it, is what the company says is a major advantage to its products. While people can choose to build a [blog](#) on Imeem server, and share their journal with anyone interested in seeing it, they can also limit viewers to a specific group of people.

The desktop software establishes a peer-to-peer type of communication among people; so all files shared and messaging communications are done only within a specified group.

"What we're trying to do is let people build their own networks and transfer information in a private way," Jan Jannink, co-founder and chief technical officer of Imeem, said. "The glue that holds (the service) all together is the ability to control all of your information, and be able to say what you want to be private and public."

The Imeem software is also easy to use, the company said.

"We're not trying to force people to learn new software," Dalton Caldwell, co-founder and chief executive of Imeem, said. "If you know how to use an [instant-messaging](#) client, and you know how to use a web browser, than you'll know how to use Imeem.

Most social-networking services, such as Friendster Inc. or Yahoo 360, provide hosted services, so all data is uploaded from the desktop to a third-party server. In letting people keep what they want in the desktop, Imeem hopes to build trust and gain more subscribers, as people become increasingly concerned with privacy on the web.

Even in delivering ads, no information on the consumer leaves the desktop, the company said. The software client monitors what the user searches for on the Imeem system, the topics discussed and other activities; and then requests advertising from the Imeem server.

"We have an opportunity to do a great job of personalizing advertising," Caldwell said.

In going after [online advertising](#), Imeem is entering a multi-billion-dollar market that continues to grow. Total online advertising and marketing spending is expected to reach \$14.7 billion this year in the United States, a 23 percent increase over 2004, according to Forrester Research. By 2010, online ad spending is expected to reach \$26 billion, or 8 percent of all advertising dollars spent.

Once on the desktop, Imeem believes it can help consumers make their computers more useful on the web. The company, for example, could provide a bridge for music players, such as Apple Computer's iTunes or Yahoo's Music Engine, or other "silos" of information, Caldwell said.

Imeem, which is approaching 10,000 users, takes its name from "meme," a term coined by biologist Richard Dawkins to describe the ideas that communities adopt and express. The company incorporated in early in 2004 and released its software in beta at the end of that year. Investors include Morgenthaler Ventures.



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