



Level: All**Works with:** Lotus Workplace Messaging**Updated:** 01-Apr-2003

Michael Harer on Lotus Workplace Messaging

Interview by

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Wanting to find out more about Lotus Workplace Messaging, we spoke to Michael Harer, Technical Product Marketing Manager, to get a product marketing manager's point of view on Lotus Workplace Messaging and on the state of messaging itself.

You came back not long ago from EBU and Lotusphere. Can you tell me a little bit about how Lotus Workplace Messaging was received by customers and the IBM sales force?

It actually exceeded my expectations. It was very well received because most of our customers understood the key positioning messages that we were sending out. Clearly, our message is that Lotus Workplace Messaging is complimentary to an existing Notes and iNotes infrastructure. So those customers who attended our presentation that was referred to as "On-Demand Messaging" got the message. They understood that it's complimentary. We're not saying that this replaces Notes or iNotes. It's not what it does at all.

It is designed to extend an existing Notes infrastructure. With this new offering, we target a new segment of users whom we call "unserved" or deskless. This user community comprises line employees, such as factory floor workers or the folks who work the floors of a Home Depot, as an example. They have an occasional need to access email. So this product is designed for the user profile, if you will, who has just an occasional need for an email. So with that in mind, we target the users whom iNotes Web Access and Notes do not target. Notes and iNotes offer more of a richer mail experience with a lot more features and functionality. They target a different set of users whom we refer to as the office user. For example, a middle manager would fit this user profile.

Do you hear comments like Lotus Workplace Messaging is iNotes for WebSphere because of the similarities in appearance between Lotus Workplace Messaging and iNotes Web Access?

There sure are similarities, and there's a reason for that. We received a very positive response from a lot of the work that went into iNotes Web Access. In fact, I did spend a little bit of time on that product. The feedback was positive in that we devoted a lot of time on understanding how to deliver high usability and ease-of-use with the iNotes Web Access user interface. Now, the reason it looks so similar in Lotus Workplace Messaging is because we wanted to leverage those key benefits. We received a lot of kudos for ease-of-use and so on. We wanted to deliver the same benefits to this new set of users.

Again, in Lotus Workplace Messaging, the key design point is to lower TCO for organizations. We do it in many ways, but one of the key ways we do this is ensuring that end users have a very intuitive environment to work in. They require virtually no end user training. And again, when I say ease-of-use, this is another point on which we ensure a lower TCO and that enables us to be more competitive with this particular offering.

What are some of the other TCO advantages for organizations? Is there anything there that really benefits administrators, for instance?

Absolutely, but before I jump to the administrative part, I want to back up a little bit. One of the other key design points is scalability. Anybody who has looked at what contributes to TCO realizes that being able to scale up reduces higher acquisition costs associated with hardware and software. By ensuring that our new product has carrier-grade scalability—or meets those levels of scalability—that will contribute to a lower TCO.

Now, on the administrative front, we have gone to great measures to ensure that Lotus Workplace Messaging integrates easily with existing Notes and Domino infrastructures. To make sure that Lotus Workplace Messaging can use our customer's existing LDAPv3 directory—whether it's our own Domino Directory or any third-party LDAPv3 directory—Lotus Workplace Messaging is standards-centric, so it can work well with that particular directory standard.



This also helps to reduce or negate end user migration costs for companies that want to utilize the directory that they have in place. That is, they don't have to move existing users to an alternate directory solution. In addition, this new messaging solution comes with the IBM Directory, which is LDAPv3-compliant. Some customers will choose to deploy that directory based on infrastructure requirements that vary from company to company. But, if you think about it—when a customer is extending an existing infrastructure—they want all of those new Lotus Workplace Messaging users to easily address mail to anyone within that enterprise. So, again, when we think of administration, or directory integration, we've developed a component that actually brings together the full address space of an enterprise, so that all Lotus Workplace Messaging users can be easily configured to view all the other users in an enterprise directory, so they can easily select the names and address mail to them.

Another point about administration that's really key is that Domino administrators can continue to use the Domino Administrator client to provision Lotus Workplace Messaging (LWM) users when the Domino Directory is the directory choice. However, they can also use the Domino Administrator client to provision LWM users even if these new users are segmented to the IBM Directory. So, you hear me say this a lot, but this is again our focus on reducing TCO. In other words, they don't have to learn another administration tool to add, delete, and manage users. They can simply go into their familiar administrator client and perform the usual operations. And to highlight one more TCO benefit, LWM automatically recognizes newly added users and creates mail accounts automatically. We call this "just-in-time" or auto-provisioning.

Does this require the administrator to customize the directory?

No customization is required. We simply use existing fields under the administration tab.

As you said, LWM is meant to be complimentary to an existing Notes or iNotes system. Certainly, our intent is not to have customers on those systems migrate to this because users will lose functionality. So, the question is who are we trying to migrate?

Keep in mind that this solution is meant to extend email to a new community of users adjacent to Notes and/or iNotes Web Access as opposed to targeting those same users who require a rich mail client experience for their job role. So, we target that lower end user profile that I described, and we often refer to that type of user as the unserved user. These are typically end users who currently do not use an existing email client for their specific job

role—hence, the name unserved. As companies look to improve their communication means to this segment of their user community, they look to deploy a lower cost email solution such as LWM to these employees. Office workers who continue to require a richer client for their respective job roles continue to need Notes and/or iNotes Web Access.

Back to your question on migration, there are cases in which some users are actually overserved. So, here's another term. Overserved users are those users who are on a rich-mail client experience, like a Notes or an Outlook client. Some organizations are looking to bring them down to the level of functionality that's appropriate for the particular job role. This is where there may be a need for migration to LWM, but in most cases, companies will not necessarily need to migrate mail content for this class of worker.

So when you get into a discussion of migration, it could be simply that some organizations want to migrate and to use their user profile information. They may also want to require mail content migration. But, if we consider the user profile that Lotus Workplace Messaging targets—the lower-tier users—this is primarily a new segment of users who will not have mail content to migrate.

In addition to supporting Internet Explorer you support POP3, and according to the LWM development manager John Banks-Binici, there are plans to support IMAP eventually.

That's correct. This messaging offering is standards-centric. So, we want to make sure that we cover all the popular standards-based clients—the good implementations that are out there, the predominant implementations which, of course, include POP3 clients like Notes or Eudora. I could name probably a dozen of them, but when you're testing and performing interoperability tests, you want to make sure that you pick the predominant implementations—implementations that are known to be good examples of adhering to the standards.

You are working with a very large customer right now in early releases of LWM. How is that going, and what has working with this customer meant in terms of the design of this product?

It's going very well. We have a design partner program underway. When you have a design partner program, you want to make sure that you partner with a good cross-sectional number of customers who will deploy your product differently—deploy the product in numerous types of infrastructures and against various third-party products, like third-party directories.

With this initial design partner, for instance, we know that we work very well with a couple of LDAP directories that are out there, for example, iPlanet and Siemens directories. They use these directories for two different purposes, and LWM is working successfully with them. As we go forward, we have many customers asking to be in this program, so we expect to get broad customer feedback and experience.

As I mentioned, we're quickly doing our homework to make sure that we have a good mix of different customer deployments. You don't want all the design partner customers deploying your product the same way. Otherwise, you're obviously not testing the whole product and its capabilities. I work with the Lotus Product Introduction team to define the criteria for accepting these customers. By doing this, we let the account reps for various customers submit a nomination form and then, because there's a facility to review their needs and our needs, we come up with the best match.

There are many email offerings already out there. Where do you see email going? And how is this product entering the market at this point going to fit into that trend?

The whole reason we've developed this particular email offering is not because of some wild idea that we thought the market needed it. It was what our customers were asking us for. In fact, they've been asking us for this for quite a long time now. During my Lotusphere session, there were a couple of quotes, both from IDC and Gartner, that talked about the need for a lower cost email solution focused on specific user profiles. So, the market has been asking for it, and our customers have been asking for it. It compliments our product portfolio in which we had a void in the past.

There have been other solutions on the market for a while now that have targeted this set of users with varying levels of functionality. We frankly understood the need and opportunity for us in our installed base. It is a great opportunity. There was a need from a customer's perspective. And so, it was the right thing to do to extend our portfolio. And, as the leader in the messaging industry, it was pretty obvious that we had to do this.

It's strange that we waited so long to do this then?

I would agree that in hindsight we learned that over the past number of years Notes and Domino could normally solve anybody's requirements. It is a rich client with email, calendar and scheduling, workflow, and so on. You name it, it does it. I guess it's fair to say that we learned from our customers and that what they needed was a lower cost light-weight mail solution for the unserved user community. Notes and Domino is great, but it primarily targets the higher productivity office users.

Besides the usability lessons from iNotes, what other lessons from that project did you bring with you into this project?

We know that iNotes Web Access approached the richness that Notes delivers. Certainly it provides email, calendar and scheduling, and to do's—just about everything. It's got a workflow aspect to it to Web-enable Notes applications, so you can use the iNotes Web Access interface to drive them.

One thing to realize is that it's a rich client experience. We wanted to take the best of the usability features and deliver them, say, downstream to lower profile users. And even on that objective, we learned from our customers that one size won't fit all. We realized that given a set of customers who want to give mail to the unserved (deskless) users, they varied in terms of the level of functionality they wanted exposed.

So one of the key lessons we learned is that you have to be able to disable a lot of the features that we put in. That is, provide the administrator the flexibility to turn off certain features to ensure that they can control the level of functionality deployed to their users.

There is a lot of integration of products in the Lotus portfolio. Are there any plans to do that with Lotus Workplace Messaging? Will we see that product being integrated with existing Lotus products?

We will include additional technologies in our Lotus next generation ("next gen") product offerings to deliver on the needs of our customers. More information on how we plan to do that will be made available over the upcoming months. But for LWM, we want to ensure a higher level of interoperability with those "killer" applications. For example, a subsequent release of LWM will include another standard called iCAL, which is the standard for interoperable calendaring. It will enable LWM to exchange calendaring information with anybody on the intranet or Internet also using an iCAL-based solution.

Can you address concerns that people have had that Notes and Domino will go away or be phased out and that the next gen products will replace it?

First, I want to emphasize that Lotus Workplace Messaging does not recycle Notes and Domino. It's all new code based on J2EE, and it targets that new user community referred to as deskless or unserved users. LWM is complementary to Notes because it targets a different user segment that does not require a rich client experience, such as Notes, which provides collaborative services.

Lotus has stated that we intend to continue developing Notes, and there are already plans for several major releases to come. We use the analogy of the two lane highway. That is, we will provide our customers two parallel lanes (one being Notes/Domino and the other being next gen). Our customers can continue down the Notes/Domino lane for as long as they see Notes and Domino meeting their specific needs. For those customers who determine that the next gen platform delivers on a new set of business needs that Notes/Domino cannot, they can choose to switch lanes when the timing is appropriate for them.

Let me state it simply: Our market-leading Notes and Domino product will be around for a long time to come, and we continue to invest in it. With the introduction of next gen solutions, our customers will now have additional options to consider as their business needs evolve.

There are clear benefits to WebSphere and DB2, but what about Domino? How does Lotus Workplace Messaging benefit Domino?

No other vendor has produced a solution that integrates as tightly as LWM to Notes and Domino. Because we're the closest to it, we can integrate it as tightly as possible. So, that's really the key benefit there. It's a benefit to existing Notes and Domino shops that want to have a seamless messaging system even though it's serving different communities of users. That's the real value.

Again, it's not built on Notes and Domino. But it does enable the two solutions to work as a single, cohesive messaging infrastructure when deploying mail to a new segment of users for a very low cost.

If you're a Notes and Domino customer and you don't have an existing WebSphere infrastructure, are you offering any sort of packages or bundles to make it easy to get up and running with that sort of infrastructure?

Yes, we realize that many of our Notes customers will not have WebSphere already installed, so we are taking steps to make this as easy as possible for customers. For example, we will provide a bundle that includes everything that a customer needs to get up and running with Lotus Workplace Messaging. This will include WebSphere, DB2, and even an optional LDAPv3 directory (IBM Directory) for those customers who still need a fully standards-based directory solution. We will also have fully trained professional services teams available to assist customers who would prefer to have messaging experts design, plan, and/or deploy their infrastructure needs.

Is WebSphere deployment relatively easy for an experienced administrator?

That's the goal. But it is also fair to say that all messaging infrastructures are different. So many times our customers engage with a services organization such as ISSL (IBM Software Services for Lotus) or a business partner. We are enabling them. In fact, we're working with ISSL now with the design partner program.

We want to make sure that we enable enough of these organizations so that when customers do want to engage with them they can. Clearly, some of the smaller organizations don't have their own messaging architects and IT staff. So, we really want to make sure we ramp up our own services teams to help them out when needed. Not all of them will need it. Some of them will, and we'll have enabled them to help the customers when they do ask.

Lotus Workplace Messaging is a simple product. We don't want to make this a full-featured client. How do you balance that?

Good question. Let's keep in mind that LWM is designed for the deskless user community and that means it must provide an intuitive user experience with a limited set of features (such as email and a personal address book) required by this user profile to do their respective jobs. Then we must be careful to only add those features that our customers require for their users. At the same time, we realize that not all customers view the needs of their users exactly the same way. As features are added, in many cases, we would expect to provide the administrator the ability to turn them on or off. This flexibility is required to ensure that any customer can deploy the level of functionality that is right for their end user community.

How does Lotus Workplace Messaging fit into the larger umbrella of the next gen products?

Lotus Workplace Messaging is really the first proof-point of delivering on our On-Demand strategy. There will be additional next gen solution announcements made during this year which will introduce more human productivity solutions to the market. We've all heard of the term "Re-Inventing email," which is a way to describe that users change the way they work with their email. It essentially is providing very high productivity tools for those users at the top tier—the CEOs, the CIOs, and the very senior managers who get inundated with over 200 messages a day.

Over time, you're going to see additional next gen messaging offerings with many new productivity features. And again, it will integrate with the other technologies, such as awareness, buddy lists, and all those things that we're used to using today. But, it's going to present them in a very different experience, so that high productivity users have a new presentation on their desktop that enables them to get the full context of a message—or any content for that matter—presented clearly within the user interface.

Let me give you one example. An executive opens up an email. Then the originator automatically pops up on a buddy list or some indicator in the UI indicates that the originator is on-line. This executive is within instant reach of the originator in case there's some dialogue that has to commence. Additionally, he might see another view which brings all of the calendar activities, and all the email threads related to a particular message brought into immediate context in his view when opening up that message. It's that experience that we're looking to achieve to deliver more value to the high productivity users.

With the emphasis on Web-enabled applications, is there still a space for desktop clients in our strategy?

I talked to a lot of customers at Lotusphere, and there is a huge momentum shifting towards a thin client experience—and a portal experience. There are customers who want to leverage a desktop installation to benefit from that client model. The reasons typically include performance benefits, better off-line capabilities, and so on. So yes, we're still living in an era in which there is a need by some customers who really want a desktop client. However, a significant percentage of our customers recognize the benefits of a thin (Web-based) client approach and the flexibility associated with a portal deployment model. This approach can provide unlimited customization options such as providing users with personalized workspace experiences.

ABOUT MICHAEL HARER

Michael Harer originally joined Lotus in 1993 as a senior software developer. In his current role as Technical Product Marketing Manager on the Messaging Solutions team, Mike is primarily focused on the successful launch of IBM Lotus Workplace Messaging. Prior to this role, Mike was senior product manager for Messaging. His most recent product management achievements include IBM Lotus Workplace Messaging and Notes/Domino messaging technologies, which included Internet standards in the area of SMTP/MIME, IMAP, POP3, and Unified Communications. Prior to product management, Mike designed and developed messaging software for 16 years, including SMTP, MIME, and X.400 messaging products. Mike holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering Technology from Northeastern University.