

Echoworx offers e-mail security

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With all the concern for on-line security, one big area has little or no privacy at all: e-mail.

Most of the 35 billion e-mail messages sent every day to the world's 1.5 billion e-mail addresses can be intercepted and read. They're the digital equivalent of postcards, says Toronto-based **Echoworx Corp.**, which has teamed with **International Business Machines Corp.** to create what it hopes to be a major revolution in e-mail -- stuffing billions of postcards into envelopes.

Echoworx Secure Mail is a plug-in to e-mail software such as Microsoft Corp.'s Outlook that adds a button marked "Secure" on the toolbar. The encryption service secures the message with a digital lock so only the recipient can open it.

If the recipient subscribes to the service, unlocking is automatic. If not, then the recipient must use a password decided upon by both sender and receiver, in what Echoworx calls a "shared-secret" setup.

The system, says Echoworx's vice-president Chris Erickson, is an old idea wrapped up in new software to make it easy and inexpensive to use. Based on the venerable public key infrastructure (PKI) standard, Echoworx Secure Mail is designed to add only one step (pressing the "secure" button) to the e-mail sending procedure.

Armonk, N.Y.-based IBM hosts the service on its huge global network of servers. Echoworx Secure Mail is a service -- anyone can subscribe from any Internet provider offering it. New York-based Internet and wireless provider **Verizon Communications Inc.** is the first to offer it to the public, charging \$6.95 (U.S.) a month. Echoworx is in talks with two Canadian companies to sell the service.