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TiVo seeks new ideas from developers

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Digital-video recorder company TiVo announced Monday the release of a software development kit that lets third-party application makers add new features to TiVo's DVR service.

The move is part of a larger strategy, code-named Tahiti, to let DVRs download information and content from the Internet that wasn't possible to download before.

The company expects to release three applications with the kit. One will display on a television weather information gathered from a broadband-connected PC. Other applications include an RSS reader and a game. A home network and broadband connection are needed to take full advantage of the applications.

The Java-based kit will be available on SourceForge.net.

The company is out to show that the TiVo service "is much more than about DVR," said Howard Look, vice president of application and user experience at TiVo. "All the great ideas don't have to come just from us."

TiVo has been working on other aspects of the Tahiti strategy--which also includes a content delivery service and commerce capabilities--for over a year. It plans to introduce new features for its Series2 DVRs throughout the year.

The Tahiti strategy, at least in part, is a competitive response to efforts by cable and satellite operators to offer their own DVR services. The company aims to differentiate its service from more basic DVR products.

The software development kit is one way of achieving that goal. The Linux-based software behind the TiVo service has already been fertile ground for hackers, and while the company may have frowned on those efforts, it did little to stop such tinkering.

"In the past we had other priorities, but we always believed new applications were good," Look said.