

**MEDIA  
PLANET**

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# Enriching Communications

YOUR GUIDE TO UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS AND THE CLOUD



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# MEDIA PLANET

## UNIFIED COMMUNICATIONS

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# The Time For UC Is Now!

BY: RICH TEHRANI, CEO, TECHNOLOGY MARKETING CORPORATION (TMC)

It's hard to imagine now, but not too long ago, if someone wanted to move data among different "office suites"—say, place a spreadsheet into a slideshow presentation—he or she often had to recreate that spreadsheet from scratch.

**T**hat's because the data formats of each program were incompatible—a problem that gradually went away with technology that now eases the integration of social media tools such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

For industry insiders such as Jeff Rodman, co-founder and chief technical officer at Polycom, a Pleasanton, Calif.-based telepresence, video, and voice solutions and service provider, a similar evolution in technology—on a larger scale—led to the creation of what's now commonly called "unified communications" or "UC."

"The same move is underway now in this new arena of business collaboration, blending another broad set of disparate functions so they can work smoothly and seamlessly together—for example, determining a colleague's presence, initiating an (instant messaging) session and then escalating to a voice or video call," Rodman said.

As the term is generally used, UC is the integration of real-time communication services such as Internet telephony, IM, video conferencing, presence information, speech recogni-

tion and call control with non-real-time communication services, such as voice-mail, e-mail, text messaging and fax.

A tech segment that market researchers are expecting to become a \$5 billion business in about five years, UC is gaining traction largely because it offers simplification, cost-savings, advanced functionality and freedom.

Consider the benefits of UC in the wireless world. As the use of mobile devices such as smartphones, notebooks and tablets rises, and as video plays a more prominent role in business communications—two trends which should get a further boost with the spread of superfast "4G" mobile Internet networks—UC is expected to become critical.

In fact, the mobile environment gets one of the fastest paybacks from UC "because you don't have a lot of buttons, you're short on time and you can't afford to scroll through a lot of screens."

"You can't be cutting and pasting, or switching among programs to find someone's alternate phone number and try to link them into an ongoing conference," he continued. "This is

one place where UC really shines—for people who spend a lot of their time in the 'mobilesphere' and really need simple, powerful and highly efficient ways to communicate."

And that certainly includes healthcare professionals, as an often on-the-go set that needs to be able to receive timely and accurate information, according to Wes Durow, vice president of global marketing at Avaya, a Ridge, N.J.-based provider of enterprise communications systems.

"With UC we have been able to substantially cut patient check-in/check-out processes and when a hospital bed often represents more than \$1 million a year in revenue the productivity benefits of communication enabling the staff work flow with UC has driven (a return on investment) in months, not years," Durow said.

Unified communications also facilitates telecommuting—an advantage for dispersed businesses that's also eco-friendly and can save office space and money.

Customer-facing businesses that must be able to scale up or down depending on demand also greatly



Rich Tehrani

benefit from UC.

James Bond, vice president of software and product development at Herndon, Va.-based hosted communications provider Apptix, recalled one client, E-Appraisal, a Las Vegas-based provider of residential and commercial appraisal services and products, that increased its collaboration capabilities while reducing e-mail costs alone by nearly 90 percent with a UC system.

"Prior to using Apptix, E-Appraisal incurred costs reaching \$500 per month with their e-mail service provider—with Apptix's integrated communications solutions, their costs for hosted SharePoint, IM and e-mail under \$60 each month," Bond said.

While unified software integration has had a head start on unified communications, UC's cost savings and productivity likely will continue to fuel its rapid adoption. One day soon, experts say, we can expect all of our communications modes to seamlessly integrate.

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\*National Institute of Standards and Technology, Information Technology Laboratory, 10-7-09, <http://csrc.nist.gov/groups/SNS/cloud-computing/>

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# Why 'UC' Is Right For Your Business

## Key Benefits To A Unified Communications And Convergence Strategy

For businesses to survive—nay, thrive—in today's economy, it's not about which tools are used to communicate and collaborate, but rather, unifying them into a streamlined platform to reduce costs and increase productivity.

And so businesses big and small are embracing a "unified communications" (UC) strategy that can integrate common communications tools—such as phone, voicemail, email, instant messages (IM), faxes, videoconferencing and real-time collaboration—and make them all accessible on various platforms, such as a computer or smartphone.

UC can significantly reduce travel, telecom and IT costs, leaving your business leaner, greener and more efficient.

### Increase productivity

"Traditionally, communication has been anything but unified," says Carmi Levy, a London, Ont.-based independent technology analyst.

"We've used different hardware, software and networks for each mode of communication—such as phone networks for voice, for example, and they've been completely separate from the data networks and PCs used to support instant messaging traffic," says Levy. "Videoconferencing has often demanded its own unique solutions, too, including special cameras, conference rooms and (potentially expensive) leased networks."

Today, however, UC combines all of these functions into a common platform as it allows employees to choose the form of communication that makes the most sense at any given moment, whether they're interfacing with customers, exchanging ideas with clients or collaborating on a document in real-time. "It's a single environment, therefore eliminating the redundancy of having separate tools, networks and support teams for each service,"

confirms Levy.

"Redundancy," as Levy puts it, also includes wasting time to log into your various email inbox, voicemail or IM clients to pick up messages linearly. Unified communications gives you a common access point on your PC or smartphone, therefore your employees spend less time chasing each other for status updates and more time working on projects.

“Thanks to technology, more people can work remotely today, which also helps the environment.”

### Saving money

"Despite the fact we have five billion people on mobile phones and about two billion on the Internet, we still waste about \$650 billion a year because people can't get connected to the right person," says IBM's Bruce Morse, vice president of Unified Communications and Collaboration Software. "This is a tremendous amount of wasted time, money and frustration—but something a unified set of tools can help address."

BY: MARC SALTZMAN

UC can also streamline communication between a customer and your business; someone calling into, say, a financial institution could now resolve a mortgage-related question by having the right person patched in—even if they've stepped out of the building.

### Opening 'presence'

One of the basic foundations of a UC strategy is called "presence," a way to see if someone you're trying to reach is available, says Morse. For example, an employee can quickly pull up someone's status through a contact list on a phone or computer, and see if a colleague is on the phone, online, using IM or on a mobile device.

"For example, someone's 'presence' status might indicate they're in a meeting, therefore you know they're not likely to pick up the phone," says Morse. "In this case, sending a message is a more conducive approach to reaching them."

### Go green

Thanks to high-quality and secure videoconferencing solutions, a unified communications strategy can significantly reduce travel, says Morse. "Not only can you save money and time by cutting back on your business travel, but think of all the greenhouse gases and pollution caused by planes, rental cars, taxis, and so on."

Morse says UC is also ideal for telecommuters who work from home: "Thanks to technology, more people can work remotely today, which also helps the environment."

"On a related note, you can also attract the best talent wherever people live and reduce the impact on their personal life should that employee want to stay in the city or state they're already in," adds Morse.

And the IBM executive is putting his mouse where his mouth is: approximately 45 percent of IBM employees work remotely, says Morse.

# Where Is UC Really Going?

## The Unified-View

BY: ART ROSENBERG

"Unified Communications" has been confusing the business marketplace because it is computer-based communications technology that integrates a number of ways to communicate person-to-person electronically.

Not only are the old ways like real-time telephony, fax, e-mail, voice messaging, etc., becoming integrated and interoperable, but new forms of exchanging text messaging information between people and automated business process applications are part of the UC game plan as well.

The flexibility of UC supports the needs of individual end users, wherever they are located, whatever their business responsibilities and relationships are, and whether they are the initiators of a communication contact or the recipient and respondent to such a contact. The key benefit is that, except for real-time voice or video conferencing, which does expect all parties to use a common real-time modality, all communicants can communicate independently in any way they want to, not necessarily in the same "channel" as the other party.

What does that really mean for business processes that will exploit UC flexibility?

One thing is that it won't be "All talk, and no action!"

When we talk, we are really exchanging information, but now we have

many modalities for ways to do that, depending on our circumstances, preferences, and device interfaces. Furthermore, when we talk there will be different kinds of action if we talk to computers. Not only do we not have to waste time and effort to transcribe important information for our records, but also such information can now become "contextual" to automate or monitor various kinds of activities instead of using expensive labor. Health care will be one of the big beneficiaries of UC when mobile patients can be notified to take their medicine, keep their appointments, or report in to emergency care.

What we have been seeing so far from UC goes far beyond lower VoIP phone costs, mobile phones, or even "unified messaging." The tip of the UC iceberg is visible below the thousands of mobile applications being developed for "multi-modal" smartphone users (or business customers), by the wireless "app stores." That's where the real communication action will be taking place, especially when "click-to-call," combined with presence management, makes a big joke of our old way of making phone calls to people!

“...information can now become “contextual” to automate or monitor various kinds of activities instead of using expensive labor.”



# Social Software And Unified Communications

## The Next Stage

The use of social software is skyrocketing, and is changing the way we communicate and collaborate. For security reasons, some companies discourage their employees from using public social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook and are turning to enterprise-class services that provide the security needed while meeting business goals (e.g.; networking with peers within the organization, finding an expert within the company, collaborating on projects, etc.).

The next step in the evolution of social software in the enterprise is integration with unified communications (UC). Tying in presence capabilities, click to call, click to conference, mobility, and other capabilities with social software services—whether public or enterprise

services—makes it easier to connect with people in your organization who have the expertise and knowledge you need to tap into.

We're starting to see integration of unified communications capabilities with social software, particularly with enterprise social software services.

Public or consumer services like Twitter are limited in various ways in the enterprise environment, and integration with UC tools are needed. For example, I may see something important in a colleague's "tweet" and want to contact them in real time via a phone call and be able to conference

in other people to discuss the issue. While Twitter doesn't provide this capability, there are add-on applications from third parties that can do this, and it's only a matter of time until this type of capability can be used with other social software services as well. Expect to see Tweets and updates from Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. show up in users' unified messaging inboxes, enabling them to send a reply via various communication modes.

Integration with business processes is also making headway. LenderFlex in Atlanta, Georgia is using Twitter to deliver risk based mortgage pricing to mortgage loan professionals and real

BY: BLAIR PLEASANT

estate agents, who can get information when and where they need it by simply twittering a few codes.

Notifications and alerts on community topics are another valuable way in which communication enabled business process (CEBP) functions are packaged into social software services. Many applications rely on immediate notification of events to the appropriate people, and Twitter or enterprise-based social networking services could be a fast and easy way to do this.

Expect to see more integration between social networking and UC in the near future.

# Demystifying Unified Communications

## Common Misconceptions About Adopting A UC Strategy For Your Business

Adopting new technology, or new ways to integrate existing technology, usually results in a learning curve that must be overcome to understand and appreciate its benefits—and a unified communications (UC) strategy for your growing business is no exception.

But there are also a number of myths surrounding UC, such as the cost of implementation, the level of technical complexity required to adopt it and what kind of business it's ideal for.

### Not a 'rip and replace' scenario

One of the biggest myths about UC is that it's a "rip and replace" scenario, says Bruce Morse, vice president of Unified Communications and Collaboration Software at IBM.

"There's a common misconception that you need to move to a completely new telephony system or IP network gear in order to participate, but this is simply not true," maintains Morse. "Most business users have been led to believe they must replace their existing infrastructure, but you can indeed deliver the capabilities [of UC] in an existing environment. Where's the value

in ripping and replacing dial tone with dial tone?" Morse asks, rhetorically.

"Asking companies to start fresh with proprietary hardware and software is a model that has never worked," adds Alistair Rennie, general manager for IBM Collaboration and Lotus Software. "People in business don't have the luxury of throwing out working assets."

"Instead, an open, modular model is imperative," says Rennie. "Our view is to add new capabilities to existing technology and do it in a cost effective and easy way, with ongoing flexibility to make decisions in the future without

being handcuffed."

As an example, Morse says it's more cost effective to keep people working with an email client they're already familiar and comfortable with—and make all the contacts "live," which enables workers to easily call, IM, email or meet on video conference—rather than teach employees an entirely new program.

### Not just for the big boys

Despite popular belief, a UC strategy isn't just for enterprises, but also for small to mid-sized businesses (SMBs) looking to save costs and improve

productivity, become more mobile and reach new markets.

"If you think about it, SMBs and larger companies have the same set of challenges, such as growing their business, reducing expenses, facing competition, and so on," says Morse.

While SMBs typically don't have a large IT staff to manage a UC environment, they can still take advantage of unified communications with a scalable, services approach that lets you start small, if need be, and grow components when the timing is right.

"There are a number of different approaches to UC, including turnkey solutions we offer such as a 'solution in a box' for SMBs," explains Morse. "You plug it in like a set-top box and this thing calls home, downloads to that hardware and auto-configures the complete office system in about two

BY: MARC SALTZMAN

hours."

"We can show how you'll pay back your investment in UC in less than 12 months," says Morse.

### From geek to street

Finally, UC doesn't require business decision makers to have a degree in computer engineering.

"A unified communications and collaborations approach is all about empowering people to get their jobs done and all the complexities of the process should all be in the background," says Rennie. "If I see a name on my PC or phone screen, I should be a click or tap away from any kind of real time communication."

"The problem with UC is too many businesses focus on the technology itself," adds Morse. "Rather, companies should ask themselves what problems do they want to address, be it being more responsive to customers, reducing travel, increasing communication and productivity among employees, and so on, because a unified strategy will help in all of these areas."

"...UC strategy isn't just for enterprises, but also for small to mid-sized businesses (SMBs) looking to save costs and improve productivity..."

# Solving The Digital Divide

BY: MICHAEL DINAN, GROUP MANAGING EDITOR, TMCNET

Facing increasingly complex IT security threats and seeking to keep pace with emerging tools in Cloud computing, more and more small- to medium-sized businesses are outsourcing their information technology needs, experts say.

As more and more sensitive data lives on IP networks and SMBs take advantage of mobile access and communications technologies, smaller businesses have become a preferred target for cyber-criminals, according to IT professionals and analysts. Also, they say, SMBs are seeing rapid developments in Cloud-based business tools that help them save money on equipment, operate more efficiently and scale up or down more easily.

The trends make IT departments critically important for SMBs, yet for budgetary and other reasons smaller businesses often have a hard time retaining in-house staff, said David Kakish, president and CEO of InhouseCIO, a Chicago-based IT staffing provider.

One popular option is to outsource IT needs.

"One thing we see a lot is that an IT person will go into an SMB and bring the network up to snuff, but then he or she will get bored because they're not challenged, often because the equipment in SMBs doesn't allow that person to develop his or her skills," Kakish said. "IT people are hard to find and harder to keep. That's the bottom line. People come to companies like us because they've just lost their IT person. We see all the time."

It's a trend that analysts are seeing too.

In fact, in the small businesses space, it's become less and less likely that SMBs have any in-house IT staff at all, according to David Smith, a vice presi-

dent and research fellow at IT market research firm Gartner Inc.

"If they have IT, they typically don't have a lot of it," Smith said.

And that's something that cyber-criminals know, according to Rodney Joffe, senior vice president and senior technologist at Neustar, a Sterling, Va.-based company that delivers addressing, interoperability, and infrastructure services.

One of the major cybersecurity problems for SMBs that's emerged in the past 18 months involves the ACH fraud—in particular, the theft of banking credentials of small enterprises, said Joffe, who has served as an Internet security advisor to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and FBI.

"They target SMBs particularly

because there is a real lack of sophistication and there is a lack of skilled staff who work for SMB businesses," Joffe said. "You generally would not find qualified network administrators that really are also security professionals, so there's a lack of awareness."

Kakish said typical security-related tools that his staff brings SMBs include SSL virtual private networks, encrypted mobile devices, such as laptops, and controlling employees' use of instant messaging through social media tools.

That's on the prevention and security side. On the plus side, dedicated and outsourced IT staff members often know more about what's available to SMBs in terms of Cloud computing tools.

Internet search and ad leader Google, for example, offers packaged applications for businesses as well as tools for businesses to build their own apps.

Rajen Sheth, senior product manager for Google Apps, said Google is seeing a "strong uptake" of its Google Apps tools

among SMBs—mostly because they need it most.

"It's extremely tough for an SMB to run servers," Sheth said. "In many of these businesses, many of them do not have an IT department whatsoever, or even an IT person...It's very difficult, for example, if they need to stand up a mail server or stand up a repository for documents, or to figure out a way to track inventory—all of those kinds of things are difficult for them to try to build on their own."

That's why companies such as Arlington Heights, Ill.-based Building Technology Consultants, PC, turn to providers such as inhouseCIO, according to BTC principal Kami Farahmandpour. The 12-person firm couldn't justify an in-house IT manager to take care of its systems, he said.

"Nobody in my company is an expert who knows what types of systems and security we need," Farahmandpour said. "InhouseCIO offers a good service for the type of business we have."

## UC Provides Lifeline To Doctors In Haiti

"The ability to communicate and switch gears was a necessity because things changed so frequently on the ground." – Dr. Silvernale

Dr. Troy Silvernale, a surgeon from Michigan, and his team from Advantage Health Physician Network, a progressive network of doctors, rushed to Haiti to aid victims of the massive earthquake that shook the region recently.

One of the results of the earthquake

was the destruction of much of the traditional telephony infrastructure. Many cellular towers collapsed leaving everyone in Haiti further isolated and making communications for rescuers at the scene difficult if not impossible. Victims were also unable to connect with family and friends on the island

or elsewhere in the world.

Dr. Silvernale realized he needed a stable communications system set up quickly for his immediate deployment to Haiti. He turned to FMC/UC provider Business Mobility Systems, supported by solutions from Ingate Systems, who provided him with an end-to-end Uni-

fied Communications solution to enable voice calls over IP (VoIP), texting capability and Internet access—even in this challenging communications situation.

As a result, the medical team was able to set up as soon as they reached Haiti. Almost immediately they were making calls and texting colleagues back in the U.S.

"With this solution our doctors are able to reach anywhere in the world

quickly and easily, to get consults from colleagues, facilitate treatment, order supplies 'on the fly' and also help victims report back to families," said Dr. Silvernale. "Within minutes of hitting the ground in Haiti we were up and running with phones and Internet, calling worried families, texting colleagues overseas for more medical supplies, getting consults. Being able to set up so quickly literally saved lives."



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# The Changing Face Of The Workplace

The magic of unified communications (UC) is its potential to conjure up instant two-way exchanges of data, thoughts, and images. Real-time tools like telephony, instant messaging, and video—coupled with e-mail, voice mail, and SMS messaging services—lubricate the free exchange of ideas, spontaneous collaboration, and multimedia brainstorming. By teleporting ideas, these tools let you work “here” and be “there” at the same time, and will change forever the workplace as we know it.

Consider healthcare and how a UC-based patient-provider dialog could change non-life threatening care. An interactive discussion, carried out at the time a problem presents itself, has a better chance of tracing the root cause of the issue than an in-office interrogation days later. Immediate care in less time than it takes to drive to the clinic, with neither the advice nurse nor primary care physician

physically present at the point of care.

And what did Lincoln have in mind when we spoke about a government for the people? Surely not an impersonal system in which the closest we come to participation is casting a ballot. UC holds the promise of direct interaction between us and our representatives, with live chat and streaming video on topical subjects, and town hall meetings in which bandwidth, not

seating room, is the rate limiting factor to participation.

Technology has evolved light years since the turn of the century, but teaching remains little changed. Receiving information while you sit in a chair bolted to the floor, and being assessed with tests having only one right answer, is anachronistic. Real life is the ultimate open book exam with open-ended problems, to paraphrase Dr. Tina Seelig

BY: MICHAEL TENNEFOSS, ARUBA NETWORKS, INC.

of Stanford University, and the best way to learn is by doing. Schools are the ideal environment for collaboration, for real-time dialog and brainstorming, and UC is the perfect white board on which to do it.

Realizing the potential of UC is no simple feat, considering that prospective users are mobile and highly distributed. The old model in which users were forced to seek out a network connection and plug in has given way to a new paradigm. Bring the network to the users. But how to do it?

High-speed Wi-Fi is the on-ramp of choice for delivering multimedia UC content within an enterprise. And Wi-Fi vendors like Aruba Networks wirelessly deliver UC applications with wire-like

speeds, making the most of platforms like Research In Motion's BlackBerry smart phones.

If you roam outside of the enterprise, everything switches to cellular yet it remains the same. Telephony vendors like Avaya give mobile users access to corporate PBX features like extension calls and voice mail, just as if they were in the office.

The seamless Wi-Fi and cellular freeway is the perfect roadway over which IBM and other solution providers can deliver applications and services unimpeded. When you move, the network and services follow along in lock-step, allowing you to realize your creative potential and the magic of being here and there at the same time.

## Cloud Computing Everything Old Is New Again

Forty years ago the notion of providing remotely accessible, shared computing resources was born in the guise of time-sharing. The similarities between time-sharing and Cloud computing today are striking. Remote terminals connecting via modems have given way to web browsers and the internet.

The service bureaus of yesterday provided basic mainframe resources, database services, and even full applications such as ERP and HR. Cloud services today range from infrastructure and platforms to enterprise-class applications.

What made time-sharing compelling to businesses of the 1970s was the access to computing resources in a timely fashion, at a lower cost, requiring little or no investment and maintenance of infrastructure. This is the same value proposition of the Cloud—doing more for less. Depending on the size and growth strategy of an organization, Cloud computing can provide access to computing resources and applications literally within minutes, chargeable to a credit card, and at a total cost point that is substantially less than building out a computing environment.

Small organizations, especially those just starting out, have access to computing resources that may have taken much larger organizations a considerable amount of time, money, and resource to build out. Like time-sharing in its day, Cloud computing has become a competitive equalizer, enabling organizations to start and scale to enterprise levels from day one.

Even large and long established organizations are discovering that they can further optimize the use of their existing computing resources via Cloud adoption, enabling faster and more cost effective development and deployment of new services and applications. Furthermore, these organizations are discovering that they can utilize Cloud services beyond their firewalls to become far more agile and responsive to the organization's needs than they could with traditional

enterprise application deployments. It all sounds so familiar...

One of the challenges facing Cloud adopters is where to start? Private Clouds versus public Clouds are a hot debate (some aspects reminiscent of enterprise mainframe versus time-share). Depending on the computing requirements, there are Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) solutions for the DIYers in the crowd, and infrastructure service providers for those that prefer to never touch a server again. Platform-as-a-Service offerings range from essential components such as databases to complete development and deployment platforms. Software-as-a-Service is the best understood, providing almost every imaginable enterprise application, including CRM/SFA, HR, ERP, and Finance, for virtually any size organization and budget.

One important common trait

between time-sharing and Cloud computing was, and is, one of the largest barriers to adoption for both—security. The same security concerns and issues that were raised at one of the first computer security conferences in the 1970s surrounding time-sharing are still relevant regarding Cloud computing today.

BY: TERRY WOLOSZYN, PERSPECSYS INC.

So as you foray into Cloud computing, you will travel a path already well travelled. The lessons learned forty years ago are relevant today, and can guide you in your decision making. Enjoy soaring into the Cloud!

“...utilize Cloud services beyond their firewalls to become far more agile...”





# The Secret That Paid Off

Whether the goal is saving money or making money with Unified Communications (UC), there is a secret to getting the most out of any UC investment: improve your business processes. Every enterprise, whether small or large, commercial or public sector, is built on a series of processes. Some of these processes are communications intensive, depending on interpersonal communications for completion. Thus, if you can use the new UC technologies to either eliminate or improve the communication steps in your enterprise's business processes, you will almost certainly find the high payoff you seek. Let's look a little deeper into this and review some examples.

**F**irst, what are these new UC technologies? Here's a short list:

- Instant Messaging: Communicate to another person without calling; then "click" to add communication through voice, video, or desktop sharing.
- Presence Status: See who is available from a list of names or a group of skills. The green, yellow or red icons seen in

most instant messaging systems.

- Electronic Conferencing: Assemble groups for meetings without travel, using voice, shared presentations, and even video.
- Mobile Communications: Extend IM, Click-to-Communicate, Presence, and some Conferencing to users on their mobile devices—laptops, tablets, or smart phones.

- Software Applications: Orchestrate all of the above functions with software to optimize the flow and to integrate the communications into your business processes.

With these new UC technologies and tools, you can take action to change how your business works. Look closely at your most important processes to find communication "hot spots"; i.e. places where

BY: MARTY PARKER, PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT, UNICOMM CONSULTING LLC

a lot of communications must occur for process completion or where there is a lot of waste, error, or rework due to communications problems. Examples might include delays due to travel time; multiple calls to multiple people or multiple numbers to find the right person or skill for approvals or assistance; or errors when highly manual communications is not performed accurately or is not logged or recorded.

When you find these communication "hot spots," you can then look at the list of UC technologies and tools to see which ones might eliminate the problem and improve the business process. Finding these, especially if measurable, leads to the potentially high payoff UC opportunities. If you have a list of possible improvements, you can implement them sequentially to minimize initial cost and risk.

Here are a couple of UC payoff ex-

amples:

- Oak Brook, Illinois based Advocate Health uses electronic conferencing to minimize delays, cut wasted travel time, and reduce out-of-pocket mileage costs between dozens of Chicagoland facilities.
- Global Crossing began using software to coordinate customer requests and trouble tickets with employee presence and skills directories to find the best available person to assist help desk engineers in solving problems, opening an Instant Messaging session with that person. An average of 4.7 phone calls pre trouble ticket were eliminated; customer service improved 80 percent.

There are hundreds of similar, published cases studies, all based on the Secret of UC payoff. Hopefully, you'll find these payoffs in your enterprise, too.

## Unified Communications

### A Time For Ascendancy

BY: GRANT SEIFFERT, PRESIDENT, TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION (TIA)

Has the time for ascendancy of Unified Communications (UC) finally arrived? It seemed so two years ago, just before the global economy tanked and put the promise of some new technologies on hold.

**N**ow that the U.S. economy has stabilized, and as broadband-enabled technologies are getting a boost from the U.S. government, the time for UC appears to be truly at hand. According to TIA's just-released *2010 ICT Market Review & Forecast*, the UC market is expected to stabilize in 2011 and to expand during 2012–13 as the economy expands, with projected spending to total an estimated \$1.55 billion in 2013.

With that in mind, we thought it might be a good time to remind potential consumers and investors about this technology sector.

First, let's define Unified Communications—or UC. Unified Communications provides real-time delivery of messages across a number of platforms based on the location and the preferred platform of the recipient. A voice-mail message, for example, can be retrieved via e-mail. These features and others improve productivity by giving users who are away from their offices access to messages from a single interface (landline phone, wireless phone or PC), saving time and avoiding missed messages sent on a different platform.

Presence technology, which allows

users to determine whether people are available, has become a major component of UC. If available, users can either place a call, avoiding the need to leave a voice message, or send an instant message to see whether speaking now is convenient or to schedule a time to talk later. Back-and-forth voicemails that characterize much of enterprise communications and waste a lot of time can be reduced with presence technology.

The key driver of UC has been the migration to IP/converged systems, the platforms for UC technologies. Also, an emerging trend in Unified Communications is the deployment of products on virtualized servers, which reduce capital expenses and management costs.

As economic conditions improve—and the focus shifts from the need for short-term cost reductions to the need to foster expansion—UC's substantial productivity improvements are likely to play a starring role in promoting growth.

### Q & A



**JAMES ANDERSON**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Switchfast Technologies

**Q: As a small business owner what should I take into account when selecting a Unified Communications provider?**

**A:** Here are three aspects of a good UC provider to help maximize your investment:

**1. Network Expertise:** Data networks and telecommunications have become irreversibly intertwined. Choosing a UC provider that can work with your entire network vastly increases your infrastructure's reliability, accelerates updates and upgrades, and minimizes downtime. Additionally, by reducing the number of vendors responsible for a single process, you are able to operate more efficiently and cost effectively.

**2. Development Expertise:** In order for your UC investment to maximize return, your infrastructure should be customized to your business's needs. The ability

to develop and modify software and firmware to make your equipment and network work together can eliminate unnecessary overhead and make your employees significantly more productive. Having a resource (onsite or outsourced) on the development side of UC will be essential to ensure that you see a return on your investment—and that return will give you an edge on your competition.

**3. Good References:** A lot of UC providers are great at selling equipment, but very bad at supporting it. If a provider doesn't offer references, ask for them. Getting the right UC provider the first time will save you headaches down the road.

