Paving the way for business innovation with integrated business communications solutions.
Introduction

There are many reasons companies move to integrated business communications solutions—from the need to replace an aging PBX system to the need to reduce the cost of doing business; from enhancing organizational dynamics to streamlining the call center to boosting employee productivity. Whatever the reason, the number of companies making the move is growing rapidly. IBM has created converged networks for more than 100 clients. And since 2001, when it received the first request from one of its own offices, IBM has provided integrated business communications capabilities to more than 110,000 users around the world using more than half a million communications devices of choice over one unified network. What will prompt your move—and when will you do it? And most important, how can you leverage integrated business communications infrastructures to create business value?

What are integrated business communications solutions?

You may have heard of IP telephony, unified communications, Voice over IP (VoIP), network convergence or any number of similar solutions. Many of these focus heavily on the replacement of existing phone systems with IP-based technology. At IBM, we see expanded possibilities using these solutions. We see the ability to create an integrated business communications infrastructure that allows you to connect, communicate and collaborate in new ways:

• Communicate with whomever you need—whether it be an individual or a group
• Use whatever means you want to communicate—voice, video, text, graphics or any combination
• Use your choice of platform—computer, phone, PDA, network appliance, etc.
• Communicate whenever you want—in real time, or asynchronously (e.g., as with e-mail)
Further, we recognize the potential for this enhanced communication environment to help you increase productivity and support business growth:

- Quickly and easily share important business information and images across your organization and with key external stakeholders
- Enable mobile, flexible, innovative ways for your employees to collaborate and to serve customers
- Achieve innovation in your organization's business processes

The shift to converged networks

The adoption of converged networks is being driven by several factors. The first is the inflexibility of most organizations' current communications infrastructures. These aging systems have proven to be a key inhibitor of the almost constant organizational change demanded by today's rapidly changing business markets. The infrastructures struggle to support the increased functionality required by changing employee and customer demands.

Typically, these infrastructures were built in siloed environments, reflecting business divisions that may no longer exist, and they most likely have undergone independent modifications, customizations and upgrades. They represent a jumble of different voice, video and data technologies that were never intended to work together, but which, out of necessity, have been made to do so.

Compounding the problem are the changes that today's organizations are undergoing in their structures and compositions: Businesses are becoming increasingly distributed, with employees, customers and partners around the globe. And they have increasingly mobile workforces that are dependent on new communications devices with voice, video and data capabilities.
To do business today, organizations need to be flexible and adaptable. They need to satisfy the needs of employees and customers who demand increased capabilities for communication and collaboration. The legacy communications infrastructures that support most organizations just aren’t up to the task.

With new technologies available in networking, however—including the explosion of wireless and mobile access—the promise of building a communications infrastructure that can handle voice, video, images and data on a single network is becoming a reality. Yet these new networks represent both an opportunity and a threat. At this time next year, will your organization be riding the crest of this next wave in communications technology? Or will you be chasing the wave from behind?

**Beyond cost-cutting — changing the way you do business**

Over the past few years, many organizations have started pilot programs to assess the value of implementing integrated business communications solutions. The problem is that, generally speaking, these assessments are being made based on the solutions’ ability to help cut spending on telecommunications. And while implementing, as an example, a converged communications infrastructure can help cut short-term costs, the real value is as an enabler that can help pave the way for future innovation in the way you do business.

Think of it like this: The Internet was created as a communications network. But what is the real value of the Internet to your business? Is it a cost saver, because your employees can now send e-mail instead of mailing a letter or making a phone call? Or has the Internet had a pervasive, game-changing effect on the way you do business? Innovations in communications have a far-reaching impact on our organizations, because communication is not only a discrete activity in itself, but a constituent part of every major business activity.
Organizations that realize this are shifting the way they think about their voice and data networks. What once simply formed the infrastructure that supported these companies’ communications and information technology functions are now becoming essential elements of their businesses. And as such, any decisions that need to be made about upgrading or updating voice and data networks are being made as business decisions. The question these companies ask themselves is this: “What impact can new communications capabilities have on the business as a whole?”

Forward-thinking companies that embrace this holistic, business-focused approach to the question of moving to integrated business communications are positioning themselves to reap the greatest benefits. They are putting themselves in place to change the way their employees interact with each other and consolidate and standardize business and communications processes, which can lead to significant improvements in employee productivity. They are creating an opportunity to change the way their organizations interact with customers, partners and suppliers, providing themselves with a chance to create differentiation from the competition by employing unique business processes and delivering superior customer service.

Companies that understand the full potential of integrated business communications solutions don’t see them simply as a replacement for aging PBX (private branch exchange) systems or as a means of reducing the cost of doing business. They see an integrated business communications infrastructure as an investment they can leverage to enhance organizational dynamics and accommodate organizational change, to streamline their call centers and improve customer service, to boost employee productivity, to offer new types of services and products or to better work with their business partners. They see a converged network as an important component of the flexible and responsive infrastructure platform upon which they are building and growing their businesses.
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Before and after: two industry scenarios

Financial services
A customer browses the Web site of a leading financial services company. The customer has an existing brokerage account with the company, but is visiting the Web site because he is interested in opening a retirement account. Confused by his options, he calls the company’s customer service number and is forced to navigate a series of telephone menus before finally talking to a call center representative—who then has to determine what types of accounts the customer is interested in and route him to a product specialist.

Now imagine that this same company has implemented an integrated business communications environment and has placed “click-to-talk” links throughout its Web site. The same customer is browsing the company’s Web site, reviewing information about Roth IRAs. In need of assistance, he clicks on the click-to-talk link on that page and enters his phone number for a call back. Within seconds, an available Roth IRA product specialist is located and provided with information about what the customer is looking at on the company’s Web site, what other accounts the customer has with the company and what other advisors he’s worked with. The product specialist is able to quickly call the customer back and provide him with the specific information that he’s looking for. The product specialist can then attach a write-up of the call to the customer’s record and forward it to the customer’s brokerage advisor for follow-up.

Healthcare
A hospital in a rural area implements an integrated business communications infrastructure. It is able to equip its nurses with PDAs they can use to view patient test results and charts, send messages to doctors or other nurse stations, send inquiries to other departments or order supplies. The result is increased productivity within the hospital. But with the infrastructure in place, hospital administrators decide they want to expand their capabilities even further to attract new physicians and improve service to patients.

Small or large, rural or urban, public, private or nonprofit—businesses of all kinds stand to gain from the myriad opportunities an integrated business communications environment enables.
They adopt a video conferencing system that allows doctors at their hospital to see and diagnose patients at health facilities hundreds of miles away. In turn, doctors at the geographically remote hospitals can consult with specialists at other hospitals. In the future, they plan to roll out new services for their patients, including the distribution of tablet PCs that patients can use to order meals from a menu, browse a TV guide, play games, join a chat session, watch educational videos about their specific conditions or even review their bills. With the flexible integrated business communications infrastructure in place, the possibilities for future innovation are almost limitless.

**Leading the way**

IBM is always looking to work with forward-thinking companies that realize the potential business value of an integrated business communications solution. We’ve created converged networks for more than 100 clients, including companies like Cisco, Dow, Lloyds and Visteon. But one of our biggest clients is our own organization. We’ve got more than 110,000 of our own users around the world using more than half a million communications devices over one unified network.

We see beyond using a converged network as a replacement for an aging telecom system or as a means of reducing cost. We design solutions that can help enhance your business communications at all levels of infrastructure, applications and business processes. Our goal is to deliver solutions that can yield far-reaching benefits by enabling you to create a more flexible, connected enterprise, increase operational efficiency and develop innovative approaches to the way you do business.
For more information
To learn more about IBM integrated business communications solutions, visit:

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