



How to Make Unified Communications and Collaboration Work for You

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Like many technology buzzwords, unified communications (UC) has had many meanings in its short life. It's now an umbrella term that covers an array of technologies—including instant messaging (IM), web conferencing, IP telephony, expertise identification, e-mail, unified messaging, mobile devices, etc.—that can be delivered behind the firewall or through the computing cloud.

Still, a singular thought resides at the heart of unified communication and collaboration (UC²): minimizing the human latency inherent in every business process. One definition found on Google describes latency as: “the amount of time that one part of a system spends waiting for another part to catch up.” Human latency is the delay in closing a sale, resolving a critical customer situation or resuming production because we can't find the needed information or expert quickly enough.

This same need is reflected in the results of IBM's annual CEO study in May: 83 percent of CEOs expected substantial change in their industry and were concerned with their company's ability to keep up.

And UC² is bringing benefits to all types of companies and industries:

● Insurance

A mid-sized U.S. property and casualty insurer was facing stiff competition from industry giants that were using the Internet to serve its traditional customers. Dependent on phone and paper-based communications, its network of independent agents simply couldn't respond fast enough to new customer inquiries or assist existing clients in a timely manner. With a UC² software platform, they opened communication channels for salespeople to immediately contact underwriters. In a typical encounter, an agent sees the underwriter's name on a policy and clicks on that name to begin a chat. Both parties have access to the same policy via a link, which allows complete discussions and rapid decisions. As a result, the company and its representatives can cut through clutter and delays to respond to customer needs by providing instant quotes. These new communication channels worked to dynamically increase the exchange of information and ideas, bonding a scattered workforce via the web. Phone calls and related costs were reduced by 50 percent,

helping the company achieve its most profitable performance in years.

● Banking

A large global bank based in Europe with more than 40,000 employees spread across 3,000 branches had a major problem. Customer satisfaction was down as half of the calls into their support centers were from their own employees looking for information on their own myriad products and services. This bank implemented a UC² infrastructure that integrated presence awareness, expertise identification, IM, VOIP chats and IP-based telephony into a common user interface. Branch representatives can now easily identify product experts and reach them without having to tax the support center's resources. Customers are also able to engage bank employees in text chats through their favorite public IM client. And by integrating their telephony infrastructure, they cannot only click-to-chat, but click-to-call and click-to-conference from the same interface. Keeping track of office and mobile phone numbers is no longer an impediment to direct contact. This bank has identified 3.5€ million of productivity gains and cost reductions from eliminating internal long distance charges and obsolete telephony equipment.

● Mergers & Acquisitions

One CIO undergoing a big merger said: “My immediate challenge is introducing 23,000 people to 17,000 people” and getting them to operate as one global team. As is the case with most mergers, multiple voice & IT infrastructures need to be integrated. In this case, real-time collaboration and voice capabilities were integrated with social networking technologies to facilitate the merger. Blogs, wikis, shared bookmarks and profiles made it possible to identify new colleagues and their areas of expertise. Surfacing presence, IM, click-to-call and video conferencing capabilities inside those social networking applications made it easy to build and leverage relationships. Finally, those blogs & wikis became the repository for knowledge created in real-time interactions, creating a mutually beneficial collaboration cycle. In this case, UC was driven as an enterprise-wide

standard and will be extended to key business processes over time.

These examples demonstrate how different types and sizes of organizations have utilized a range of communications and collaboration methods to improve their ability to find, reach and collaborate with internal and external parties. Each approached UC from a different perspective: improving an existing business process, reducing telephony costs, enhancing collaboration in the sales field, and as a strategic enabler to build a new organization. But each of these examples comes back to the same thought, reducing the human latency inherent in the way we do business every day.

Several simple recommendations will greatly enhance your chances of success when adopting UC.

First, focus on the business view. What aspect of human latency are you trying to address? Outline your business priorities, operational constraints, regulatory requirements and budget considerations. These will be invaluable in prioritizing the what, where and how of implementing UC² solutions.

Second, develop your UC² strategy and architecture based on your business strategy. Think through the UC capabilities that best support your business objectives. Catalog the UC capabilities your organization already has in place. Avoid the temptation to incorporate all the available bells and whistles if they are unnecessary. Develop a sandbox, or incubator testing environment if appropriate to prove the relevance and return to your business requirements.

Third, lay out a roadmap. Make sure you are leveraging your current investments as appropriate, even as you take advantage of new technologies. Develop an implementation plan driven by your business priorities. Stage your roll-out to get the highest ROI first.

Finally, establish an ongoing approach to re-evaluating new technologies and capabilities as they evolve to continue to add to the benefits you can get from UC.

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